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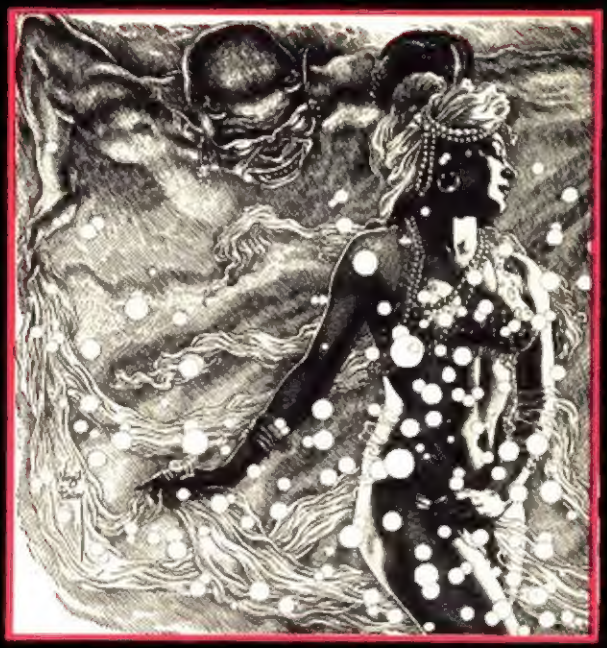

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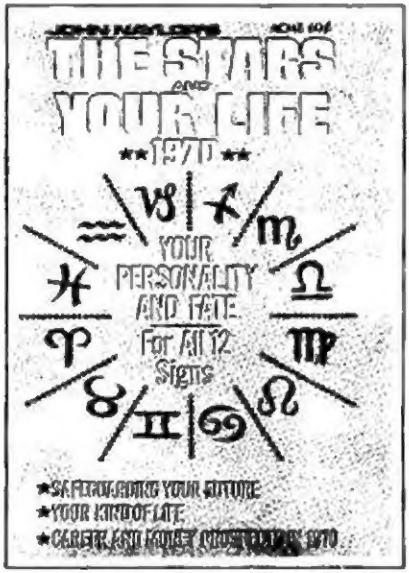

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BIZARRE FANTASY TALES

Volume 1 *CONTENTS FOR FALL* *Number 1*

THE EDITOR'S PAGE 4
THE GREAT CIRCLE (novella) ..... *Henry S. Whitehead* 10
THE DOOM THAT CAME TO SARNATH ..... *H. P. Lovecraft* 81
INQUISITIONS (Reviewing James Branch Cabell's fantasies) 88
NEVER BET THE DEVIL YOUR HEAD ..... *Edgar Allan Poe* 92
A TASTE OF RAIN AND DARKNESS ..... *Eddy C. Bertin* 102
THE "V" FORCE ..... *Fred C. Smale* 110
READER'S PREFERENCE PAGE (double-barrelled) 129/130

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BIZARRE FANTASY TALES, Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall 1970 (whole Number 1). Published quarterly by Health Knowledge, Inc. Executive and editorial offices at 140 Fifth Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10011. Single copy 60c. Manuscripts accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelopes will be carefully considered, but the publisher and editors will not be responsible for loss or damage. All payments for accepted contributions are made upon publication. **Copyright c 1970 by Health Knowledge, Inc. All rights reserved under Universal International and Pan American copyright conventions. Printed in U.S.A.**

The Editor's Page

The *AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE*, in which I find much virtue (though fault is not entirely absent), lists among the definitions of the word "fantasy": "(4.a.) Literary or dramatic fiction characterized by highly fanciful or supernatural elements." The word has, of course, various other meanings, but we are not concerned with them here and now; this is the relevant one to our present purposes.

Without belaboring the word "supernatural," I would say that it belongs in a definition of "fantasy" that is relevant to what we are doing here. You and I may not agree whether "supernatural" can really be applied to anything that actually exists, but certainly we can agree that a wide variety of things have been labelled "supernatural" and that these matters constitute a large (but not total) area of literary and dramatic fiction. And as the years have gone by, more and more material which, at the time of writing, seemed to be if not quite scientific, at least within an acceptable range of extrapolation on what was then considered scientific, has quite fallen out of that category. Edgar Rice Burroughs' Mars and Venus stories were more fantasy than science fiction even at the time of writing, but now belong entirely within the range of fantasy. Perhaps some readers of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* are persuaded that vampires of that nature do indeed exist (although such readers may not entirely agree with Stoker's laws of vampirology – the precise powers and limitations ascribed in the novel), but surely most readers, however moved by the author's spell, consider the story a fantasy. It terrified me so much in 1930 that I could not finish it; even now, it's good for a chill of the pretend sort.

I mentioned science fiction above, since from the very first days when this type of story was published in popular magazines – and certainly since the advent of *AMAZING STORES* in 1926 – there have been tales for which the editors had to invoke special pleading in order to justify them on their contents pages. And in addition, there are stories which seemed fairly acceptable as science fiction at the time, in the light of scientific theories of the time, etc., – such as Ray Cummings' notions of atomic structure – but which can now be read only as fantasy. Some of these might be very appropriate here, but, of course there would be severe restrictions. What I would look for would be a strong fantasy element that was notable even at the time.

And in addition, there is the grotesque story, an example of which would be Meyrink's *Bal Macabre*, or witty, whimsical, and sometimes satirical fancies like Edgar Allan Poe's *Never Bet The Devil Your Head* or *The Devil in the Belfry*. Speaking of Poe, and other classic authors, I am taking to heart the complaints of some of you in relation to the Poe stories that we have run in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*, and *WEIRD TERROR TALES*. Before deciding upon any for publication here, I shall check diligently through the

contents of currently available collections of Poe's tales in soft cover. The most notable of these is Viking's *The Portable Poe* (a thick volume, well worth $1.95 to anyone who would like a well-printed representative sample of the author's works in the many areas wherein he wrote, with excellent introductions); but there are some other collections that stay in print and offer tales not to be found in the Viking Book. I shall not be deterred from reprinting good tales by Poe and others which belong here and are otherwise to be found only in hard cover (expensive) editions. However, there are not very many examples by EAP that would fit these specifications, and all are short, so no one need worry about seeing much too much Poe here.

The range I have in mind for you is so broad that I cannot hope to do more than suggest it here, and certainly it cannot be covered entire in any one issue. For a start, we shall present issues featuring short novels, which would have run in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* in two installments had both production and distribution realities (unhappy, but we can only do as well as possible within them; they are beyond our means to change to any great extent) required us to put all our publications on a quarterly basis. In a sense this is an ill wind not entirely divorced from good, as one result is this new magazine, which will bring up the number of issues bringing you stories within the entire range of oldtime imaginative fiction (mostly from the old magazines) to 16 a year. Many of you have pleaded that we bring out *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* every month. This proved impossible, if we wanted to have even the hope of remaining in business; but in effect you will be getting one publication of this nature every month, plus four issues of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES,*

MAGAZINE OF HORROR

Presents in its 33rd Issue, summer 1970

THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

by
Robert A.W. Lowndes

* * *

THE BRIDE WELL

A Tale From Cornwall

by
David H. Keller, M.D.

* * *

THE NAMELESS OFFSPRING

by
Clark Ashton Smith

* * *

CAMERA OBSCURA

A New Story

by
Ted H. Straus

* * *

Now On Sale - Or See Page 125 of This Magazine.

STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

Presents in its 16th Issue, Summer 1970

THE DEVIL'S ROSARY

a Jules de grandin tale

by
Seabury Quinn

* * *

THE SILVER BULLET

by
Phyllis A. Whitney

* * *

THE MAN WHO COLLECTED EYES

a new story

by
Eddy C. Bertin

* * *

THE TEMPLE OF DEATH

a "Taine" story

by David H. Keller, M.D.

* * *

Now on sale - or see page 125 of this magazine

paired with each issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR.*

Since all of these publications are published to please you rather than the editor (although the editor must be pleased in a sense: I certainly shall not publish what I consider to be a bad story, even if some of you ask for it), your opinions and suggestions are not only welcomed, but urgently requested. As with almost every other form of group activity, you active readers are a small minority who do approximately 90% of the work--the work here being the job of presenting feedback to the editor. I shall have to make allowances, as I always have made, for individual enthusiasms and antipathies (or such clearly pertaining only to a tiny fraction within the active minority) and, for the most part, go along with what the majority of active readers want, insofar as conditions permit me to do so. (I learned the facts of life in respect to magazine publishing the hard way, as many others have done and as some of you may learn them: The editor is restricted by limitations not of his choosing, and there will often be things for which readers ask that he would like very much to give them, but it is not possible for him to do so. Sometimes this is a temporary matter--certain requests can be fulfilled in time--but there will always be the permanently unfeasible.)

Thus, the policy stated above can be considered negotiable; and circumstances may very likely require some issues with the usual make-up of novelets and short stories, rather than a long feature novella, for I'm not going to present a story simply because it is of the requisite length. And time is of the essence: a week after sending copy to the printer for such an issue (no feature novella this time) I might come across what would have been an excellent long story. Too

bad, but the schedule can't be held up. (Ideally, a worthwhile magazine would not have a regular schedule, but would appear only when the editor was able to gather together an issue containing only what he considered to be the very highest quality of material. But we do not live in an ideal world, and such a magazine could be brought out only as the private hobby of a retired millionaire—who might indeed go broke pursuing it.)

As with our other titles, it will be our aim to present at least one new story in every issue, but again, not just for the sake of doing so. Should no acceptable one, the requisite length be to hand, then none will appear that time. (We have been fortunate, thus far, in that it has never been necessary to bring out an issue of these publications without any new fiction—although in one instance, the solitary new story had been published abroad.) Of course, there will be more than one when possible. For the time being, we can only consider the short-short lengths: 1,000 to 3,000 words. (And, of course, we cannot consider lengths above 6,000 words for new stories in any of our titles.)

In this respect, while such is not the fundamental purpose of any of our magazines, we offer a special opportunity to new authors—not because the regular magazines in the field of fantasy and science fiction do not publish these lengths at all, or spurn them from newcomers, but rather because it is only very rarely that they will consider the sort of story wherein we specialize. We are not interested in timeliness, or in social or political significance, or moral uplift, etc., as such. A well-done story, written for no other ostensible reason than the author's desire to tell what he considers a good and fascinating *story*, may have interior meanings which go considerably beyond

WEIRD TERROR TALES

presents in its Fall 1970 Issue, No. 3

STRAGELLA

a chilling novelet

by
Hugh B. Cave

* * *

THE WHEEL

by
H. Warner Munn

* * *

THE CELLAR ROOM

a new story

by Steffan B. Aletti

* * *

THE TRAP

a bizarre novelet

by Henry S. Whitehead

plus the popular Readers' departments

* * *

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THRILLING
WESTERN
MAGAZINE

presents in its Fall 1970 issue (No. 6)

HELL HOGAN'S FUNERAL

by Clee Woods

* * *

WOLF

an unusual animal tale
by Palmer Hoyt

* * *

THE LADY OR
THE TRIGGER

by Charles Tenney Jackson

* * *

THE LUCK OF
ROARING CAMP

a classic tale
by Bret Harte

* * *

THE PARSON OF
OXBOW BEND

by Roy W. Hinds

* * *

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what appears on the surface—and in this respect may do what a good poem does.

You—any one of you—will not have exactly the same standards for "good" in poetry that I have; but perhaps we can agree that the good poem says something plainly, on the surface, in a way that cannot be said in anything like a similar length in prose—or, at least, without anything like the music of language, etc.—but also has meanings within meanings below the surface. A good poem is not a puzzle or a cryptogram, although any example may be puzzling or obscure to you or me simply because, due to the limitations of our experience—both living experience and vicarious experience through reading, etc.—it is not clear to us just what the poem is *about*. (Nearly all of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, for example, lose most of their difficulty, once you know at each point what the poet is talking about. And some, of course, present hardly any difficulty at all.)

This applies to fiction, too. Some stories will be obscure to you or me simply because we do not grasp what they are about, but that difficulty vanishes once this becomes clear. But some stories, like some poems, are written either in an excessive application of Pound's dictum that poetry is language charged with meaning as much as possible—you have a cryptogram before you've reached the limits of possibility—or in the deliberate intent to confound all save a few intimates of the author, etc.

You see, I am not pleading for simplicity to the point of imbecility, but rather I accept the demands of the poet or author *providing* that he or she accede to *my* demand: that the surface of his poem or story interest me sufficiently to make me want to do such work as may be necessary in order to get the meat beneath the shell. The shell must be attractive to me. (And if I find it

somewhat attractive, but am not moved sufficiently to do further work, then I'm entirely willing to allow that any fault lies with me and not with the writer—and certainly I have waived the right of judging the worth of the exhibit.)

So an opportunity for new writers does exist here; and it is interesting to think of just a few of today's well-known names in fantasy and science fiction who started out with short or short-short stories in the magazines, in many instances at low (and sometimes very low) rates: Isaac Asimov, James Blish, Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, Lester del Rey, Poul Anderson, Robert A. Heinlein, Jack Williamson, Donald A. Wolheim, Richard Wilson, Frederik Pohl, Henry Kuttner, and in earlier days, H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, August Derleth, and Robert E. Howard. The list could be extended considerably, but one of the interesting things about it is that in a number of instances, the first or the first few stories gave little indication of what would come. (I myself started out in the short-short length, and I remember in 1940 saying somewhat discouragedly to F. Orlin Tremaine—who had bought and published the first professional story I had printed under my own name that actually was my own story—that I'd like to do novelets, but short stories seemed to be all I could accomplish. He smiled and said that if I just kept at it, the time would come when I would find the longer lengths much easier to handle than short stories. He was right.)

The general approval which you have given to the departments in our other titles encourages me to announce that we shall have a reader's department here, as soon as letters received warrants it; and we shall report upon your verdict when sufficient ballots have come in. We shall run book reviews when space

(turn to page 126)

EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN

presents in its Fall issue (No. 58)

REPORT FROM CAMELOT
by Paul Johnstone

* * *

THE PROPHET OF SCIENCE

by Irwin Ross, Ph.D.

* * *

POSSESSED BY A DEAD ARTIST?

by Charles Powell

* * *

THE CHARTS OF TWO WHO HEAL

by Louise Landry

* * *

SO YOU WANT TO "DEVELOP PSYCHIC POWERS"?

by Jerryl L. Keane, Ph.D.

* * *

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THE GREAT CIRCLE

by Henry S. Whitehead

THE TRANSITION FROM those hours-on-end of looking down on the dark-green jungle of virgin forest was startling in its abruptness. We had observed this one break in the monotonous terrain, of course, well before we were directly over it. Then Wilkes, the pilot, slowed and began to circle. I think he felt it, the element I have referred to as startling; for, even from the first—before we landed, I mean—there was something— an atmosphere—of strangeness about this vast circular space entirely bare of trees with the exception of the giant which crowned the very slight elevation at its exact center.

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illustration by H. W. Wesso

The Rev. HENRY S. WHITEHEAD (1888-1932) was a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the "High Church" sector, and was at one time Children's Pastor at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in New York City. It is very possible, however, that none of us would ever have heard of him had he not taken a parish in the West Indies, whence he returned in 1925. Whether his post at St. Mary's came before or after his service in the Virgin Islands is unknown to me.

He was first seen in the famous Anniversary Issue of *WEIRD TALES* – wherein the May, June, and July 1924 issues, which had been printed but not released, were bound together under one cover and sold for 50c a copy, a truly tremendous bargain for the lover of bizarre and unusual fiction. The cover of this issue bore an illustration from the narrative *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs*, signed by Harry Houdini, but actually written by H. P. Lovecraft, who would not officially be given credit for the tale until its reprint in the June-July 1929 issue. Whitehead's debut here was a short story, *Tea Leaves*.

Most of the 31 stories from his typewriter that were published in *WEIRD TALES* and *STRANGE TALES* are set in the West Indies, which he knew so well, and are rooted in the beliefs of the people; many of them are told by Gerald Canevin, who is the narrator of the present story. Editor Farnsworth Wright would note in the May 1925 issue of WT, writing about Whitehead, that: "In the West Indies magic is the one touchstone to the character of the people. The obeah doctor still flourishes; the jumbee roams the canefields at night on the watch for unwary Negroes: and two of Mr. Whitehead's personal friends are popularly believed to be werewolves!" While there have been changes in the Islands since 1925, these comments are still true to a considerable extent.

Dr. Whitehead was apparently well-loved by the people of his parish, and one of the many reasons for this is hinted at in a letter he wrote to Wright, which the latter published in part in *The Eyrie*, following the comment above: " I wish I could get a story of the Virgin Islands published in the local dialect, in which I preach,' writes Mr. Whitehead, 'but it would be virtually unintelligible to the reading public:

" ' "Mon, yo 'lated!"

" ' "A-wee ca' cuke tell a-wee ca' done yett, mon!" '

" 'I don't suppose there's anything quite like it on the top of the earth.' "

Whether Harry Bates sought him out when he launched *STRANGE TALES* in 1931, or whether the author (or his agent) was tipped off, and sent mss. to Bates at once, I do not know. It would seem that the former was most likely, for the editor would have had to have accepted the short novelet *Cassius*, which appeared in the second issue some time before the first issue was completed; in any event, although Whitehead missed the first issue, he appeared in all the rest. He never wrote any novels, so far as I have heard, and this may be his longest story. It has not been reprinted in magazines since its original publication.

I know at any rate that I felt it; and Dr. Pelletier told me afterward that it had seemed to lay hold on him like a quite definite physical sensation. Wilkes did not circle very long. There was no need for it and I think he continued the process, as though looking for a landing place, as long as he did, on account of that eeriness rather than because of any necessity for prolonged observation.

At last, almost, I thought, as though reluctantly, he shut off his engine—"cut his gun" as airmen express it—and brought the plane down to an easy landing on the level greensward within a hundred yards of the great tree standing there in its majestic, lonely grandeur. The great circular space about it was like a billiard table, like an English deer park. The great tree looked, too, for all the world like an ash, itself an anomaly here in the unchartered wilderness of Quintana Roo.

We sat there in the plane and looked about us. On every side, for a radius of more than half a mile from the center where we were, the level grassy plain stretched away in every direction and down an almost imperceptible gradual slope to the horizon of dense forest which encircled it.

There was not a breath of air stirring. No blade of the fine short grass moved. The tree, dominating everything, its foliage equally motionless, drew our gaze. We all looked at it at the same time. It was Wilkes the pilot who spoke first, his outstretched arm indicating the tree.

"Might be a thousand years old!" said Wilkes, in a hushed voice. There was something about this place which made all of us, I think, lower our voices.

"Or even two thousand," remarked Pelletier.

We had taken off, that morning in 192—, at ten o'clock, from Belize. It was now one o'clock in the afternoon. We had flown due north for the first eighty miles or so, first over the blue waters of landlocked Chetumal Bay, leaving Ambergris Cay on our right, and then Xkalok, the southeastern point of Quintana Roo; then over dry land, leaving the constricted northern point of the bay behind where parallel 19, north latitude, crosses the 88th meridian of longitude. Thence still due north until we had

turned west at Santa Cruz de Bravo, and continued in that direction, glimpsing the hard, metallic luster of the noon sun on Lake Chinahaucanab, and then, veering southwest in the direction of Xkanba and skirting a tremendous wooden plateau on our left, we had been attracted, after cursory, down-looking views of innumerable architectural remains among the dense forestation, to our landing place by the abrupt conspicuousness of its treeless circularity.

That summarizes the geography of our flight. Our object, the general interest of the outlook rather than anything definitely scientific, was occasioned by Pelletier's vacation, as per the regulations of the U.S. Navy, of whose Medical Corps he was one of the chief ornaments; from his duties as Chief of the Naval Hospital in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. Pelletier wanted to get over to Central America for this vacation. He talked it over with me several times on the cool gallery of my house on Denmark Hill. Almost incidentally he asked me to accompany him. I think he knew that I would come along.

We started, through San Juan, Puerto Rico, in which great port we found accommodation in the Bull Line's *Catherine* with our friend Captain Rumberg, who is a Finn, as far as Santo Domingo City. From there we trekked, across the lofty intervening mountains, with a guide and pack burros, into Haiti. At Port au Prince we secured accommodations as the sole passengers on a tramp going to Belize in British Honduras, which made only one stop, at Kingston, Jamaica.

It was between Kingston and Belize that the idea of this air voyage occurred to Pelletier. The idea of looking down comfortably upon the Maya remains, those cities buried in impenetrable jungles, grew upon him and he waxed eloquent out of what proved an encyclopedic fund of knowledge of Maya history. I learned more about these antiquities than I had acquired in my entire life previously! One aspect of that rather mysterious history, it seemed, had intrigued Pelletier. This was the abrupt and unaccountable disappearance of what he called the earlier of major civilization. The superior race which had built the innumerable temples, palaces and other elaborate and

ornate structures now slowly decaying in the jungles of the Yucatan Peninsula, had been, apparently, wiped out in a very brief period. They had, it seemed, merely disappeared. Science, said Pelletier, had been unable to account for this catastrophe. I had, of course, read of it before, but Pelletier's enthusiasm made it vastly intriguing.

Our two-men-and-hired-pilot expedition into this unexplored region of vast architectural ruins and endless forestation had landed, as though by the merest chance, here in a section presenting topographical features such as no previous explorers had reported upon! We were, perhaps, two hours by air, from Belize and civilization—two months, at least, had we been traveling afoot through the thick jungles, however well equipped with food, guides, and the machetes which all previous adventurers into the Yucatan jungles report as the first essential for such travel.

Pelletier, with those small verbal creakings and gruntings which invariably punctuate the shifting of position in his case, was the first to move. He heaved his ungainly bulk laboriously out of the plane and stood on the grassy level ground looking up at Wilkes and me. The sun beat down pitilessly on the three of us. His first remark was entirely practical.

"Let's get into the shade of that tree, and eat," said Dr. Pelletier.

Ten minutes later we had the lunch basket unpacked, the lunch spread out, and were starting in to eat, there in the heart of Quintana Roo. And, to all appearances, we might have been sitting down picnicking in Kent, or Connecticut!

I remember, with a vivid clarity which is burned indelibly into my mind, Wilkes reaching for a tongue sandwich, when the wind came.

Abruptly, without any warning, it came, a sudden, violent gust out of nowhere, like an unexpected blow from behind, upsetting our peaceful little session there, sociably, on the grass in the quiet shade of the ancient tree which looked like an English ash. It shredded to filaments the paper napkin I was holiding. It caused the squat mustard bottle to land twenty feet way. It

sucked dry the brine out of the saucerful of stuffed olives. It sent Pelletier lumbering after a rapidly rolling pith sun helmet. And it carried the pilot Wilkes' somewhat soiled and grimy Shantung silk jacket—which he had doubled up and was using to sit on, and had released by virtue of half rising to reach for that tongue sandwich—and blew it, fluttering, folding and unfolding, arms now stiffly extended, now rolled up into a close ball, up, off the ground, and then, in a curve upward and flattened out and into the tree's lower branches, and then straight up among these, out of our sight.

Having accomplished all these things, and scattered items of lunch broadcast, the sudden wind died a natural death, and everything was precisely as it had been before, save for the disorganization of our lunch—and save, too, for us!

I will not attempt to depart from the strict truth: we were, all of us, quite definitely startled. Wilkes swore picturesquely at the disappearance of his jacket, and continued to reach, with a kind of baffled ineptitude which was quite definitely comic, after the now scattered tongue sandwiches. Pelletier, returning with the rescued sun helmet, wore a vastly puzzled expression on his heavy face, much like an injured child who does not know quite what has happened to him. As for me, I daresay I presented an equally absurd appearance. That gust had caught me as I was pouring limeade from a quart thermos into three of those half-pint paper cups which are so difficult to manage as soon as filled. I found myself now gazing ruefully at the plate of cold sliced ham, inundated with the cup's contents.

Pelletier sat down again in the place he had vacated a moment before, turned to me, and remarked:

"Now where did that come from?"

I shook my head. I had no answer to that. I was wondering myself. It was Wilkes who answered, Wilkes goaded to a high pitch of annoyance over the jacket, Wilkes unaware of the singular appropriateness of his reply.

"Right out of the corner of hell!" said Wilkes, rather sourly, as he rose to walk over to that enormous trunk and to look up into

the branches, seeking vainly for some glimpse of Shantung silk with motor grease on it.

"Hm!" remarked Pelletier, as he bit, reflectively, into one of the sandwiches. I said nothing. I was trying at the moment to divide what was left of the cold limeade evenly among three half-pint paper cups.

2

IT WAS nearly a full hour later, after we had eaten heartily and cleared up the remains of the lunch, and smoked, that Wilkes prepared to climb the tree. I know because I looked at my watch. It was two fourteen— another fact burned into my brain. I was estimating when, starting then, we should get back to Belize, where I had a dinner engagement at seven. I thought about five or five fifteen.

"The damned thing is up there somewhere," said Wilkes, looking up into the branches and leaves. "It certainly hasn't come down. I suppose I'll have to go up after it!"

I gave him a pair of hands up, his foot on them and a quick heave, a lower limb deftly caught, an overhand pull; and then our Belize pilot was climbing like a cat up into the great tree's heart after his elusive and badly soiled garment.

The repacked lunch basket had to be put in the plane, some hundred yards away from the tree. I attended to that while Pelletier busied himself with his notebook, sitting cross-legged in the shade.

I sauntered back after disposing of the lunch basket. I glanced over at the tree, expecting to see Wilkes descending about then with the rescued jacket. He was still up there, however. There was nothing to take note of except a slight—a very slight—movement of the leaves, which, looking up the tree and seeing, I remarked as unusual because not a single breath of air was stirring anywhere. I recall thinking, whimsically, that it was as though the great tree were laughing at us, very quietly and softly, over the trouble it was making for Wilkes.

I sat down beside Pelletier, and he began to speak, perhaps for

the third or fourth time, about that strange clap of wind. That had made a very powerful impression on Pelletier, it seemed. After this comment Pelletier paused, frowned, looked at his watch and then at the tree, and remarked: "Where is that fellow? He's been up there ten minutes!"

We walked over to the tree's foot and looked up among the branches. The great tree stood there inscrutable, a faint movement barely perceptible among its leaves. I remembered that imagined note of derision which this delicate movement had suggested to me, and I smiled to myself.

Pelletier shouted up the tree: "Wilkes! Wilkes—can't you find the coat?"

Then again: "Wilkes! Wilkes—we've got to get started back pretty soon!"

But there was no answer from Wilkes, only that almost imperceptible movement of the leaves, as though there were a little breeze up there; as though indeed the tree were quietly laughing at us. And there was something—something remotely sinister, derisive, like a sneer, in that small, dry, rustling chuckle.

Pelletier and I looked at each other, and there was no smile in the eyes of either one of us.

We sat down on the grass then as though by agreement. Again we looked at each other. I seemed to feel the tree's derision; more openly now, less like a delicate hint, a nuance. It seemed to me quite open now, like a slap in the face! Here indeed was an unprecedented predicament. We were all ready to depart, and we had no pilot. Our pilot had merely performed a commonplace act. He had climbed a tree.

But—he had not come down—that was all.

It seemed simple to state it to oneself that way, as I did, to myself. And yet, the implications of that simple statement involved—well, what *did* they involve? The thing, barring an accident: Wilkes having fallen into a decay-cavity or something of the sort; or a joke: Wilkes hiding from us like a child among the upper branches—barring those explanations for his continued absence up there and his refusal to answer when called to, the thing was—well, impossible.

Wilkes was a grown man. It was inconceivable that he should be hiding from us up there. If caught, somehow, and so deterred from descending, at least he could have replied to Pelletier's hail, explained his possible predicament. He had, too, gone far up into the tree. I had seen him go up agilely after my initial helping hand. He was, indeed, well up and going higher far above the lower trunk area of possible decay-cavities, when I had left him to put the lunch basket back in the plane. He had been up nearly twenty minutes now, and had not come down. We could not see him. A slightly cold sensation up and down my spine came like a presage, a warning. There seemed—it was borne in abruptly upon me—something sinister here, something menacing, deadly. I looked over at Pelletier to see if anything of this feeling might be reflected in his expression, and as I looked, he spoke.

"Canevin, did you notice that this deforested area is circular?"

I nodded.

"Does that suggest anything to you?"

I paused, took thought. It suggested several things, in the light of my recent, my current, feeling about this place centered about its great tree. It was, for one thing, apparently an unique formation in the topography of this peninsula. The circularity suggested an area set off from the rest, and by design—somebody's design. The "ring" idea next came uppermost in my mind. The ring plays a large part in the occult, the preternatural: the elves' ring; dancing rings (they were grassy places, too); the Norman cromlechs; Stonehenge; the Druidical rites; protective rings, beyond the perimeter of which the Powers of Evil, beleaguering, might not penetrate . . . I looked up from these thoughts again at Pelletier.

"Good God, Pelletier! Yes—do you imagine . . . ?"

Pelletier waved one of his big, awkward-looking hands, those hands which so often skirted death, defeated death, at his operating table.

"It's significant," he muttered, and nodded his head several times. Then: "That gust of wind, Canevin—remember? It was *that* which took Wilkes' coat up there, made him climb after it; and now—well, where is he?"

I shook my head slowly. There seemed no answer to Pelletier's question. Then: "What is it, Pelletier?"

Pelletier replied, as was usual with him, only after some additional reflection and with a certain deliberateness. He was measuring every word, it seemed.

"Every indication, so far, points to—an air-elemental."

"An air-elemental?" The term, with whatever idea or spiritual entity, or vague, unusual superstition underlay its possible meaning, was familiar to me, but who—except Pelletier, whose range of knowledge I certainly had never plumbed— would think of such a thing in this connection?

"What is an air-elemental?" I asked him, hoping for some higher information.

Pelletier waved his hand in a gesture common to him.

"It would be a little difficult to make it clear, right off the bat, so to speak, Canevin," said he, a heavy frown engendered by his own inability to express what might be in that strange, full mind of his, corrugating his broad forehead. "And even if I had it at my tongue's end," he continued, "it would take an unconscionable time." He paused and looked at me, smiling wryly.

"I'll tell you, Canevin, all about them, if we ever get the chance." Then, as I nodded, necessarily acquiescing in this unsatisfactory explanation, he added: "That is, what little, what very little, I, or, indeed, anybody, knows about them!"

And with that I had, perforce, to be satisfied.

It seemed to my taunted senses, attuned now to this suggested atmosphere of menace which I was beginning to sense all about us, that an intensified rustle came from the tree's leaves. An involuntary shudder ran over my body. From that moment, quite definitely, I felt it: the certain, unmistakable knowledge that we three stood alone, encircled, hemmed in, by something; something vast, powerful beyond all comprehension, like the incalculable power of a god, or a demigod; something elemental and, I felt, old with a hoary antiquity; something established here from beyond the ken of humanity; something utterly inhuman, overwhelmingly hostile, inimical, to us. I felt that we were on *Its*

ground, and that *It* had, so far, merely shown us, contemptuously, the outer edge of *Its* malice and of *Its* power. *It* had, quietly, unobtrusively, taken Wilkes. Now, biding *Its* time, *It* was watching, as though amused; certain of *Its* malignant, *Its* overwhelming, power; watching us, waiting for *Its* own good time to close in on us . . . .

I stood up, to break the strain, and walked a few steps toward the edge of the tree's nearly circular shade. From there I looked down that gentle slope across the motionless short grass through the shimmering heat waves of that airless afternoon to the tree-horizon.

What was that? I shaded my hands and strained my vision through those pulsating heat waves which intervened; then, astonished, incredulous, I ran over to the plane and reached in over the side and brought out the high-powered Lomb-Zeiss binoculars which Bishop Dunn at Belize had loaned me the evening before. I put them to my eyes without waiting to go back into the shade near Pelletier. I wanted to test, to verify, what I thought I had seen down there at the edge of the encircling forest; to assure myself at the same time that I was still sane.

There at the jungle's edge, clear and distinct now, as I focused those admirable binoculars, I saw milling about, crowding upon each other, gesticulating wildly—shouting, too, soundlessly of course, at that distance from my ears—evidencing in short the very apogee of extreme agitation; swarming in their hundreds—their thousands, indeed—a countless horde of those dull-witted brown Indians, still named Mayas, some four hundred thousand of which constitute the native population of the Peninsula of Yucatan—Yucatan province, Campeche, and Quintana Roo.

All of them, apparently, were concentrated, pointing, gesticulating, upon the center of the great circle of grassland, upon the giant tree — upon us.

And, as I looked, shifting my glasses along great arcs and sections of the jungle-edge circle, fascinated by this wholly bizarre configuration, abruptly, with a kind of cold chill of conviction, I suddenly perceived that, despite their manifest

agitation, which was positively violent, all those excited Indians were keeping themselves rigidly within the shelter of the woods. Not one stepped so much as his foot over that line which demarcated the forested perimeter of the circle, upon that short grass.

3

I LOWERED THE GLASSES AT LAST and walked back to Pelletier. He had not moved. He raised to me a very serious face as I approached.

"What did you see down there, Canevin?" He indicated the distant rim of trees.

He listened to my account as though preoccupied, nodding from time to time. He only became outwardly attentive when I mentioned how the Indians kept back to the line of trees. He allowed a brief, explosive "Ha!" to escape him when I got to that. When I had finished:

"Canevin," said he, gravely, "we are in a very tight place." He looked up at me still gravely, as though to ascertain whether or not I realized the situation he had in mind. I nodded, glanced at my watch.

"Yes," said I, "I realize that, of course. It is five minutes to three. Wilkes has been gone, up there, three quarters of an hour. That's one thing, explain it as you may. Neither of us can pilot a plane; and, even if we were able to do so, Pelletier, we couldn't, naturally, go back to Belize without Wilkes. We couldn't account for his disappearance: 'Yes, Mr. Commissioner, he went up a tree and never came down!' We should be taken for idiots, or murderers! Then there's that—er—horde of Indians, surrounding us. We are hemmed in, Pelletier; and there are, I'd say, thousands of them. The moment they make up their minds to rush us—well, we're finished, Pelletier," I ended these remarks and found myself glancing apprehensively toward the rim of jungle.

"Right enough, so far!" said Pelletier, grimly. "We're 'hemmed in,' as you put it, Canevin, only perhaps a little differently from the way you mean. Those Indians"—his long arm swept our

horizon—"will never attack us. Put that quite out of your mind, my dear fellow. Except for the fact there's probably only food enough left for one scant meal, you've summed up the—er—material difficulties. However—"

I interrupted. "That mob, Pelletier; I tell you, there are thousands of them. Why should they surround us if—"

"They won't attack us. It isn't *us* they're surrounding, even though our being here, in a way, is the occasion for their assembly down there. They aren't in any mood to attack anybody, Canevin—they're frightened."

"Frightened?" I barked out. "Frightened! About what, for God's sake?" This idea seemed to me so utterly far-fetched, so intrinsically absurd, at first hearing—after all, it was I who had watched them through the binoculars, not Pelletier who sat here so calmly and assured me of what seemed a basic improbability. "It doesn't seem to make sense to me, Pelletier," I continued. "And besides, you spoke just now of the 'material' difficulties. What others are there?"

Pelletier looked at me for quite a long time before answering, a period long enough for me to recapitulate those eerier matters which I had lost sight of in what seemed the imminent danger from those massed Indians. Then:

"Where do you imagine Wilkes is?" inquired Pelletier. "Can you—er—see him up there?" He pointed over his shoulder with his thumb, as artists and surgeons point.

"Good God, Pelletier, you don't mean . . . ?"

"Take a good look up into the tree," said Pelletier, calmly. "Shout up to him; see if he answers now. You heard me do it. Wilkes isn't deaf!"

I stood and looked at my friend sitting there on the grass, his ungainly bulk sprawled awkwardly. I said nothing. I confess to a whole series of prickly small chills up and down my spine. At last I went over close to the enormous hole and looked up. I called: "Wilkes! Oh Wilkes!" at the top of my voice, several times. I desisted just in time, I think, to keep an hysterical note out of that stentorian shouting.

For no human voice had answered from up there—only, as it seemed to me, a now clearly derisive rustle, a kind of thin cacophony, from those damnable fluttering leaves which moved without wind. Not a breath stirred anywhere. To that I can take oath. Yet, those leaves . . . . .

The sweat induced by my slight exertions, even in the tree's shade, ran cold off my forehead into my eyes; down my body inside my white drill clothes. I had seen no trace of Wilkes in the tree, and yet the tree's foliage for all its huge bulk was not so dense as to prevent seeing up into every part of it. Wilkes had been up there now for nearly an hour. It was as though he had disappeared from off the face of Earth. I knew now, clearly, what Pelletier had had in mind when he distinguished between our "material" and other difficulties. I walked slowly back to him.

Pelletier had a somber look on his face. "Did you see him?" he asked. "Did he answer you?" But, it seemed, these were only rhetorical questions. Pelletier did not pause for any reply from me. Instead, he proceeded to ask more questions.

"Did you see any ants on the trunk? You were quite close to it." Then, not pausing: "Have you been troubled by any insects since we came down here, Canevin? Notice any at lunch, or when you took the lunch basket back to the plane?" Finally, with a sweeping, upward gesture: "Do you see any birds, Canevin?"

I shook my head in one composite reply to these questions. I had noticed no ants or any other insects. No bird was in flight. I could not recall, now that my attention had been drawn to the fact, seeing any living thing here besides ourselves. Pelletier broke in upon this momentary meditation:

"The place is tabu, Canevin, and not only to those Indians down there in the trees—to everything living, man!—to the very birds, to the ground game, to the insects!" He lowered his voice suddenly to a deep significant resonance which was purely tragic.

"Canevin, this is a theater of very ancient Evil," said Dr. Pelletier, "and we have intruded upon it."

4

AFTER THAT BLUNT STATEMENT coming as it did from a man like Dr. Pelletier, I felt, strange as it seems, better. That may appear the reverse of reason; yet, it is strictly, utterly true. For, after that, I knew where we stood. Those eerie sensations which I have mentioned, and which I had well-nigh forgotten in the face of the supposed danger from that massed horde of semi-savages in the forest, crystallized now into the certainty that we stood confronted with some malign menace, not human, not of this world, something not to be gaged or measured by everyday standards of safety. And when I, Gerald Canevin, know where I stand in anything like a pinch, when I know to what I am opposed, when all doubt, in other words, is removed, I act!

But first I wanted to know rather more about what Pelletier had in that experienced head of his; Pelletier, who had looked all kinds of danger in the face in China, in Haiti, in this same Central American territory, in many other sections of the world.

"Tell me what you think it is, Pelletier," I said, quietly, and stood there waiting for him to begin. He did not keep me waiting.

"Before Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood, Canevin, and so set anatomy on the road to present modern status, the older anatomists said that the human body contained four 'humours.' Do you remember that? They were called the Melancholic, the Sanguine, the Phlegmatic, and the Choleric Humours—imaginary fluids! These, or the supposed combination of them, in various proportions, were supposed to determine the state and disposition of the medical patient. That was 'science'—in the days of Nicholas Culpepper, Canevin! Now, in the days of the Mayo Brothers, that sort of thing is merely archaic, historical, something to smile at! But, never forget, Canevin, it *was* modern science—once! And, notice how basically true it is! Even though there are no such definite fluids in the human body—speculative science it was, you know, not empirical, not based on observation like ours of today, not experimental—just notice how those four do actually correspond

to the various human temperaments. We still say such-and-such a person is 'sanguine' or 'phlegmatic,' or even 'choleric'! We attribute a lot of temperament today to the ductless glands with their equally obscure fluids; and, Canevin, one is just about as close to the truth as the other!

Now, an analogy! I reminded you of that old anatomy to compare it with something else. Long before modern natural science came into its own, the old-timers, Copernicus, Duns Scotus, Bacon, the scientists of their day, even Ptolemy, had their four elements: air, earth, water and fire. Those four are still elements, Canevin. The main difference between now and then is the so-called 'elemental' behind each of them—a thing with intelligence, Canevin, a kind of demigod. It goes back, that idea, to the Gnostics of the second and third centuries; and the Gnostics went back for the origins of such speculations to the once modern science of Alexandria; of Sumer and Accad; to Egypt, to Phrygia, to Pontus and Commagene! That gust of wind, Canevin—do you—"

"You think," I interrupted, "that an air-elemental is . . . ?"

"What more probable, Canevin? Or, what the ancients meant by an air-elemental, a directing intelligence, let us say. You wouldn't attribute all this, Wilkes' disappearance, all the rest of it, so far"— Pelletier indicated in one comprehensive gesture the tree, the circle of short grass, even the insectless ground and the birdless air—"to everyday, modern, material causes; to things that Millikan and the rest could classify and measure, and compute about—would you, Canevin?"

I shook my head.

"I'm going up that tree after Wilkes," I said, and dropped my drill coat on the grass beside Pelletier. I laid my own sun-helmet on the ground beside him. I tightened my belt a hole. Then I started for the tree. I expected some sort of protest or warning from Pelletier. He merely said:

"Wilkes got caught, somehow, up there, because he was taken off his guard, I should surmise. You know, more or less, what to expect!"

I did not know what to expect, but I was quite sure there

would be something, up there. I was prepared. This was not the first time Gerald Canevin had been called upon to face the Powers of Darkness, the preternatural. I sent up a brief and fervent prayer to the Author of this universe, to Him Who made all things, "visible and invisible" as the Nicene Creed expresses it. He, Their Author, was more powerful than They. If He were on my side . . .

I jumped for the limb up to which I had boosted Wilkes, caught it, got both hands around it, hauled myself up, and then, taking a deep breath, I started up among those still dryly rustling leaves in an atmosphere of deep and heavy shade where no breath of air moved . . . .

I perceive clearly enough that in case this account of what happened to Wilkes and Pelletier and me ever has a reader other than myself—and, of course, Pelletier if he should care to peruse what I have set down here; Wilkes, poor fellow, crashed over the Andes, less than three months ago as I write this—I perceive that, although the foregoing portion of this narrative does not wholly transcend ordinary strangeness, yet, that the portion which is now to follow will necessarily appear implausible; will, in other words, strain severely that same hypothetical reader's credulity to the utmost.

For, what I found when I went up the tree after Wilkes—spiritually prepared, in a sense, but without any knowledge of what I might encounter—was—well, it is probable that some two millenia, two thousand years or thereabouts had rolled over the jungles since that background Power has been directly exercised. And yet, the memory of *It* had persisted without lapse among those semi-savage inhabitants such as howled and leaped in their agitation down there at the jungle's rim at that very moment; had so persisted for perhaps sixty generations.

I went up, I should estimate, about as far as the exact center of the great tree. Nothing whatever had happened so far. My mind, of course, was at least partly occupied by the purely physical affair of climbing. At about that point in my progress upward among the branches and leaves I paused and looked

down. There stood Pelletier, looking up at me, a bulky, lonely figure. My heart went out to him. I could see him, oddly foreshortened, as I looked straight down; his contour somewhat obscured by the intervening foliage and branches. I waved, and called out to him, and Pelletier waved back to me reassuringly, saying nothing. I resumed my climb.

I had got myself perhaps some fifteen feet or more higher up the tree—I could see the blue vault above as I looked straight up—when, quite as abruptly as that inexplicable windclap which had scattered our lunch, the entire top of the tree began suddenly, yet as though with a sentient deliberation, to constrict itself, to close in on me. The best description of the process I can give is to say that those upper branches, from about the tree's midst upward, suddenly squeezed themselves together. This movement coming up toward me from below, and catching up with me, and pressing me upon all sides, in a kind of vertical peristalsis, pushed me straight upward like a fragment of paste through a collapsible tube!

I slid along the cylinder formed by these upper branches as they yielded and turned themselves upward under the impact of some irrestible pressure. My pace upward under this mechanical compulsion was very rapidly accelerated, and, in much less time than is required to set it down, I flew straight up; almost literally burst out from among the slender topmost twigs and leaves as though propelled through the barrel of some monstrous air-gun; and, once clear of the tree's hindering foliage and twigs, a column of upward-rushing air supporting me, I shot straight up into the blue empyrean.

I could feel my senses slipping from my control as the mad pace increased! I closed my eyes against the quick nausea which ensued, and fell into a kind of blank apathy which lasted I know not how long, but out of which I was abruptly snatched with a jar which seemed to wrench every bone and muscle and nerve and sinew in my body.

Unaccountably, as my metabolism slowly readjusted itself, I felt firm support beneath me. I opened my eyes.

I found myself in a sitting position, the wrenching sensations

of the jar of landing rapidly dissipating themselves, no feeling of nausea, and, indeed, incongruous as such a word must sound under the circumstances being related, actually comfortable! Whatever substance supported me was comparatively soft and yielding, like thick turf, like a pneumatic cushion. Above me stretched a cloudless sky, the tropical sky of late afternoon, in these accustomed latitudes. Almost automatically I put down my hand to feel what I was resting upon. My eyes, as naturally, followed my hand's motion. My hand encountered something that felt like roughly corrugated rubber, my eyes envisaged a buff-colored ground-surface entirely devoid of vegetation, a suface which, as I turned my head about curiously, stretched away in every direction to an irregular horizon at an immense distance. This ground was not precisely level, as a lawn is level. Yet it showed neither sharp elevations nor any marked depressions. Quite nearby, on my right as I sat there taking in my novel surroundings, two shallow ravines of considerable breadth crossed each other. In one direction, about due south I estimated from the sun's position, three distant, vast, and rounded elevations or hummocks raised themselves against the horizon; and beyond them, dim in the far distance, there appeared to extend farther south vague heights upon four gradually rising plateaus, barely perceptible from where I sat. I was in the approximate center of an enormous plain the lowest point of which, the center of a saucerlike terrain, was my immediate environment; the reverse conformation, so to speak, of the great circle about the tree.

"Good God!" said a voice behind me. "It's Canevin!"

5

I TURNED SHARPLY to the one direction my few seconds' scrutiny had failed to include. There, not twenty feet away, sat Wilkes the pilot. He had found his jacket! He was wearing it, in fact. That, queerly enough, was my first mental reaction to having a companion in this weird world to which I had been transported. I noted at that moment, simultaneously with seeing

Wilkes, that from somewhere far beneath the surface of the ground there came at regular intervals a kind of throbbing resonance as though from some colossal engine or machine. This pulsing, rhythmical beat was not audible. It came to me—and to Wilkes, as I checked the matter over with him later—through the sense of feeling alone. It continued, I may as well record here, through our entire stay in this world of increasing strangeness.

"I see you have recovered your coat," said I, as Wilkes rose and stepped toward me.

"No doubt about it!" returned Wilkes, and squared his angular shoulders as though to demonstrate how well the jacket fitted his slender figure.

"And what do you make of—this?" he asked, with a comprehensive gesture including the irregular, vegetationless, buff-colored terrain all about us.

"Are we in the so-called 'fourth dimension,' or what?"

"Later," said I, "if you don't mind, after I get a chance to think a bit. I've just been shot into this place, and I'm not quite oriented!" Then: "And how did you manage to get yourself up here? I suppose, of course, it's up!"

There is no occasion to repeat here Wilkes' account of his experience in the tree and later. It was identical with mine which I have already described. Of that fact I assured Wilkes as soon as he had ended describing it to me.

"This—er—ground is queer enough," remarked Wilkes. "Look at this!"

He opened his clasp-knife, squatted down, jabbed the knife into the ground half an inch or so, and then cut a long gash in what he had referred to as the "ground." In all conscience it was utterly different from anything forming a surface or topsoil that I had ever encountered. Certainly it was not earth as we know it. Wilkes cut another parallel gash, close beside his first incision, drew the two together with his knife at the cut's end, and pried loose and then tore up a long narrow sliver. This, held by one thin end, hung from his hand much as a similarly shaped slice of fresh-cut kitchen linoleum might hang. It looked, indeed, much

like linoleum, except that it was both more pliable and also translucent.

"I have another sliver in my pocket," said Wilkes, handing this fresh one to me. I took the thing and looked at it closely.

"May I see yours?" I asked Wilkes.

Wilkes fished his strip out of a pocket in that soiled silk jacket and handed it to me. He had it rolled up, and it did not unroll easily. I stretched it out between my hands, holding it by both ends. I compared the two specimens. His was considerably drier than mine, much less pliable. I said nothing. I merely rolled up Wilkes' strip and handed it back to him.

"I've stuck right here," remarked Wilkes, "ever since I landed in this Godforsaken place, if it is a place, because, well, because there simply didn't seem to be anything else to do. The sun has been terrific. There's no shade of any kind, you see, not a single spot, as far as you can see; not any at all on the entire damned planet—or whatever it is we've struck! Now that you've 'joined up,' what say to a trek? I'd agree with anyone who insisted that anything at all beats standing here in one spot! How about it?"

"Right," I agreed. "Let's make it either north or south—in the direction of those hummocks, or, up to the top of that plateau region to the south'ard."

"O. K. with me," agreed Wilkes. "Did you, by any blessed chance, bring any water along when you came barging through?"

I had no water, and Wilkes had been here more than an hour in that pitiless glare without any before my arrival. He shook his head ruefully.

"Barring a shower we'll have to grin and bear it, I imagine. Well, let's go. Is it north, or south? I don't care."

"South, then," said I, and we started.

Our way took us directly across one of the intersecting depressions in the ground which I have mentioned. The walking was resilient, the ground's surface neither exactly soft nor precisely hard. It was, I remember thinking, very much like a very coarse crepe-rubber sole such as is used extensively on tennis and similar sports shoes. As we went down the gradual slope of that ravine the footing changed gradually, the color of underfoot

being heightened by an increasingly reddish or pinkish tinge, and the surface becoming smoother as this coloration intensified itself. In places where the more general corrugations almost disappeared, it was so smooth as to shine in the sun's declining rays like something polished. In such stretches as we traversed it was entirely firm, however, and not in the least slippery, as it appeared to be to the eye.

A cool breeze began to blow from the south, in our faces as we walked. This, and a refreshing shower which overtook us about six o'clock, served to revive us just at a point in our journey when we had really begun to suffer from the well-nigh intolerable effects of the broiling sun overhead and the lack of drinking water. The sun's decline put the finishing touch upon our comparative comfort. As for the actual walking, both of us were as tough as pine knots, both salted thoroughly to the tropics, both in the very pink of physical condition. Nevertheless, we felt very grateful for these several reliefs.

The sun went down, this being the month of February, just as we were near the top of the gentle slope which led out of the ravine's farther side. Two miles or so farther along as we continued to trek southward, the stars were out and we were able to keep our course by means of that occasional glance into the heavens which night travelers in the open spaces make automatically.

We pressed on and on, the resilient underfooting favoring our stride, the cool breeze, which grew gradually stronger as we walked into it, blowing refreshingly into our faces. This steady breeze was precisely like the evening trade wind as we know it who live in the Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean.

There was some little talk between us as we preceeded, steadily, due south in the direction of a rising, still distant, mounded tableland, from the summit of which--this had been my original idea in choosing this direction--I thought that we might be enabled to secure a general view of this strange, vegetationless land into which we two had been so singularly precipitated. The tableland, too, was considerably less distant

from our starting point than those bolder hummocks to the north which I have mentioned.

From time to time, every couple of miles or so, we sat down and rested for a few minutes.

6

AT ABOUT FOUR IN THE MORNING, when we had been walking for more than eleven hours by these easy stages, the ground before us began gradually to rise, and, under the now pouring moonlight, we were able to see that a kind of cleft or valley, running almost exactly north and south, was opening out before us. Along the bottom of this, and up a very gradual rise, we mounted for the next two hours. We estimated that we had gone up several thousand feet from what I might call the mean level of our starting point. For this final stage of our journey, the walking conditions had been especially pleasant. Neither of us was particularly tired.

As we mounted the last of the acclivity, my mind was heavily occupied with Pelletier, left there alone under the tree, with the useless plane nearby and those swarming savages all about him in their great numbers. Also I thought, somewhat ruefully, of my abandoned dinner engagement in Belize. I wondered, in passing, if I should ever sit down to a dinner table again! It seemed, I must admit, rather unlikely just then. Quite likely they would send out some sort of rescue expedition after us; probably another plane following the route which we had placed on file at the airport.

Of such matters, I say, I was thinking, rather than what might be the result, if any, of our all night walk. Just then the abrupt, bright dawn of the tropics broke over at our left in the east. We looked ahead from the summit we had just gained in its blazing, clarifying effulgence, over the crown of the great ridge.

We looked out.

No human being save Wilkes and me, Gerald Canevin, has seen, in modern times at least, what we saw. And, so long as Earth's civilization and science endure, so long as there remains the

procession of the equinoxes, so long, indeed, as the galaxy roars its invincible way through unsounded space toward imponderable Hercules, no man born of woman shall ever again see what opened there before our stultified senses, our dazzled eyes . . .

Before us the ground beyond the great ridge began to slope abruptly downward in one vast, regular curve. It pitched down beyond this parabola in an increasingly steep declivity, such as an ocean might form as it poured its incalculable volume over the edge of the imagined geoplanarian earth-edge of the ancients! Down, down, down to well-nigh the extreme range of our vision it cascaded, down through miles and miles of naked space to a sheer verticalness—a toboggan slide for Titans.

The surface of this downward pitching slope, beginning some distance below the level upon which we stood there awestruck, was in one respect different from the land as we had so far seen it. For there, well down that awful slope, we could easily perceive the first vegetation, or what corresponded to vegetation, that we had observed. Down there and extending out of our range of vision for things of that size, there arose from the ground's surface, and growing thicker and more closely together as the eye followed them down, many great columnar structures, irregularly placed with relation to each other, yet of practically uniform height, thickness, and color. This last was a glossy, almost metallic, black. These things were branchless and showed no foliage of any kind. They were narrowed to points at their tops, and these tapering upper portions waved in the strong breeze which blew up from below precisely as the tops of trees moved under the impulse of an Earthly breeze. I say "Earthly" advisedly. I will proceed to indicate why!

It was not, primarily, the inherent majesty of the unique topography which I am attempting to describe which rooted Wilkes and me, appalled, to that spot at the ridge's summit. No. It was the clear sight of our planet, Earth, as though seen from an airplane many miles high in Earth's atmosphere, which, in its unexpectedness, caused the sophisticated Wilkes to bury his face in his arms like a frightened child at its mother's lap, caused me to turn my head away. It was the first, demonstrative proof that

we had been separated from Earth; that we stood, indeed, "up," and with a vengeance, miles away from its friendly surface.

It was then, and not before, that the sense of our utter separation, our almost cosmic loneliness, came to us in an almost overwhelming surge of uncontrollable emotion. The morning sun shone clear and bright down there upon Earth, as it shone here where we were so strangely marooned. We saw just there, most prominently presented to our rapt gaze, the northeast section of South America, along the lower edge of our familiar Caribbean, the Guianas, Venezuela, the skirting islands, Margherita, Los Roques, Bonaire, and, a trifle less clear, the lower isles of my own Lesser Antilles: Trinidad, Barbados on the horizon's very edge, the little shadow I knew to be Tobago.

I shall not attempt further to tell here how that unexpected, yet confirmatory sight, shook the two of us; how small and unimportant it made us feel, how cut off from everything that formed our joint backgrounds. Yet, however detached we felt, however stultifying was this vision of Earth down there, it was, literally, as nothing, even counting in our conviction of being mere animated, unimportant specks among the soulless particles of space—even that devastating certainty was as nothing to the climatic focus of what we were to behold.

I sat down beside Wilkes, and, speaking low to each other, we managed gradually to recover those shreds of our manhood which had partly escaped us, to get back some of that indomitable courage which sustains the sons of men and makes us, when all is said and done, the ultimate masters of our destinies.

When we were somewhat recovered—readjusted perhaps is the better word—we stood up and once more looked down over the edge of this alien world, down that soul-dizzying slope, our unaided eyes gradually accommodating themselves to seeing more and more clearly its distant reaches and the continentlike section which lay, dim and vague from distance, below it. We observed now what we had failed to perceive before, that the enormous area of that land-pitch was, in its form, roughly rounded, that it sloped to right and left, as well as directly away

from us; that it was, in short, a tremendous, slanted column, like a vast circular bridge between the level upon which we then stood and that continentlike mass of territory down below there in the vague distance. As the sun rose higher and higher the fresh breeze died to a trickle of air, then ceased. Those cylindrical, black, treelike growths no longer waved their spikes. They stood now like rigid metallic columns at variant, irregular angles. In the increasing light the real character of what I had mentally named the Continent below became more nearly apparent. It was changing out of its remote vagueness, taking form. I think it dawned upon me before Wilkes had succeeded in placing what was slowly emerging, mentally. For, just before I turned my head away at the impact of the shock which that dawning realization brought to my mind and senses, the last thing I observed clearly was Wilkes, rigid, gazing below there, staring down that frightful declivity, a mounting horror spreading over the set face above the square-cut jaw . . .

Realization of the rewards of this world as dross had come, two millenia ago, to Him Who stood beside the Tempter, upon the pinnacles of the Temple, viewing the kingdoms of the world. In some such fashion—if I may so describe the process without any intentional irreverence—there came to me the blasting conviction which then overtook me, forced itself into my protesting mentality, turned all my ideas upside-down.

For it was not a continent that we had been gazing down upon. It was no continent. It was not land— ground. *It was a face*—a face of such colossal majesty, emerging there, taking form in the rays of the revealing sunlight, as utterly to stagger mind and senses attuned to earthly things, adjusted for a lifetime to Earthly proportions; a face ageless in its serene, calm, inhumaneness; its conviction of immeasurable power; its ab-human inscrutability.

I reeled away, my face turned from this incredible catastrophe of thought; and, as I sank down upon the ground, my back turned toward the marge of this declivity, I knew that I had dared to look straight into the countenance of a Great Power, such as the ancients had known. And I realized, suddenly, sick at

heart, that this presence, too, was looking out of eyes like level, elliptical seas, up into my eyes, deep into my very inmost soul.

But this conviction, so monstrous, so devastating, so incredible, was not all! Along with it there went the heart-shaking realization that what we had visualized as that great slope was the columnar, incredible arm of that cosmic Colossus—that our night-long trek had been made across a portion of the palm of his uplifted hand!

Overhead the cloudless sky began to glow a coppery brown. An ominous, wedge-shaped tinge spread fast, gathering clouds together out of nowhere as it sped into the north. And now the sun-drenched air seemed heavy, of a sudden difficult to breathe under that pitiless, oppressive sun which glared out of the bland, cerulean corner of the sky in which it burned. A menacing sultriness filled the atmosphere, pressed down upon us like a relentless hand. A hand! I shuddered involuntarily, and turned to Wilkes and spoke, my hand on his shoulder. It was a matter of seconds before the stark horror died out of his eyes. He interrupted my almost whispered words: "Did you see It, Canevin?"

I nodded.

"I think we'll have to get back from the edge," I repeated my warning he had failed to hear, "down into that—ravine—again. There's the making of a typhoon up topside, I'm afraid."

Wilkes shot a quick, weatherwise glance aloft. "Right-o," said he, and we started together toward that slight shelter of the shallow valley up which we had toiled as dawn was breaking.

But the wind-storm from out of the north broke upon us long before we had gained this questionable refuge. A blasting hurricane smote down upon us out of that coppery, distorted sky. We had not a chance. The first blast picked us up as though we had been specks of flotsam lint, carried us straight to the brink, and over, and down; and then, side by side, so long as we retained our senses under the stress of that terrific friction, we were hurled at a dizzyingly increasing rate down that titanic toboggan slide as its sheer vertical pitch fell away under our spinning bodies, always faster and faster, with the roar of ten

Niagaras rending the very welkin above—down, down, down into the quick oblivion which seemed to shut out all life and all understanding and all persisting hope in one final, mercifully quick-ended horror of ultimate destruction.

Somehow, I carried with me into that disintegration of the senses and ultimate coma, the thought of Pelletier.

7

IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE in this strange narrative which I am setting down as best I can, some sense of order and a reasonable brevity, I have, from time to time, summarized my account. I have, for example, mentioned once that enginelike beat, that regular pulsation to be felt here. I have said, to avoid reference to it, that it continued throughout our sojourn in the "place" which I have described. That is what I mean by summarizing. I have, indeed, omitted much, very much, which, now that I am writing at leisure, I feel would burden my account with needless detail, unnecessary recording of my emotional reaction to what was happening. In this category lies all that long conversation between Wilkes and me, as we strode along side by side, on that long night walk.

But, of all such matters, the most prominent to me was the preoccupation—a natural one, I believe—with that good friend whom I had left looking up into the tree which looked like an English ash, as I climbed away from him into what neither of us could possibly visualize or anticipate, away, as it transpired, from our very planet Earth, and into a setting, a set of conditions, quite utterly diverse from anything the mind of modern man could possibly conceive or invent.

This preoccupation of mine with Pelletier had been virtually continuous. I had never had him wholly out of my mind. He had uttered, it will be remembered, no protest at my leaving him down there alone. That, at the time, had surprised me considerably. But on reflection I came to see that such an attitude on his part was entirely natural. It was part of that tremendous fortitude of his, almost fatalism, which was an

integral part of his character. I have known few men better balanced than that ungainly, big-hearted naval surgeon friend of mine. Pelletier was the man I should choose, beyond all others, to have beside me in a pinch.

And here we were, Wilkes and I, in a situation which I have endeavored to make as clear as possible, perhaps as tight a pinch as any human beings have ever been in, and the efficient and reliable Pelletier not only miles away from us, as we would think of the separation in Earthly terms, but, actually, as our sight down that slope had devastatingly revealed, as effectively cut off from us as though we two human atoms had been standing on the planet Jupiter! There had been no moment, I testify truly, since I had been drawn into that tree-vortex and hurled regardless into this monstrous environment, when I had not wanted that tried and true friend beside me.

For, in that same desire to keep this narrative free from the extraneous, to avoid labored repetitions, I see that I have said nothing, so far at least, of what I must name the atmosphere of terror, the sense of malign pressure against my mind, and against Wilkes', which had been literally continuous; which by now, under the successive impacts of shock to which both of us had been subjected, had soared hauntingly to the status of a sustained horror, a sense of helplessness well-nigh intolerable, as it became borne in upon us what we had to face.

We were like a pair of sparrows in a great, incalculable grip.

Against that dread Power there seemed to be no possible defense. We were, and increasingly realizing the fact, completely, hopelessly, *Its* prey. Whenever *It* decided to close in upon us, *It* would strike—at intruders, as the canny Pelletier, sensing our status on *Its* ground, had phrased the matter. *It* had us, and we knew it! And there was nothing we could do, men of action though both of us were; nothing, that is, that any man of whatever degree of fortitude could do. Therein lay the oppressive horror of the situation.

When I opened my eyes my first impression was a mental one; to wit, that an enormous period of time had elapsed since last I had looked upon the world and its sky above it. This curious

delusion, I have since learned, is due to the degree of unconsciousness which has been sustained. The impression, I will note in passing, shortly wore off. My second, immediately subsequent, impression was a physical one. I ached in every bone, muscle, tendon and sinew of a body which all my life I have kept in the highest possible degree of physical fitness. I felt sorely bruised. Every inch of me protested as I attempted to move, holding me back. And, immediately after this realization, that old preoccupation with Pelletier reestablished itself in my mind and became abruptly paramount. I could, so to speak, think of nothing, just then, but Pelletier.

Into this cogitation there broke a suppressed groan. With a wrenching effort, I rolled over, and there, behind me, lay Wilkes. We were, it seemed, still together! Whatever the strange Power might be planning and executing upon us, was upon us both. Very slowly and carefully, Wilkes sat up, and, with a rueful glance over at me, began laboriously to feel about over his body.

"I'm merely one enormous bruise," said Wilkes, "and I'm a bit surprised that either of us is—"

"Alive at all!" I finished for him, and we nodded, rather dully, at each other.

"Yes, after that last dash they gave us," added Wilkes. Then, slowly: "What do you suppose it's all about, Canevin? Who, what is it? Is it—er—Allah—or what?

"I'm none too agile myself," I said, after a pause spent going over various muscles and joints. "I'm intact, it seems, and I've got to agree with you, old man! I don't in the least understand why we're not in small fragments, 'little heaps of huddled pulp,' as I once heard it put! However, if *It* can use a typhoon to move us about, of course *It* can temper the typhoon, land us gently, keep us off the ground—undoubtedly *It* did, for some reason of *Its* own! However, the main point is that we're still here—but where *are* we now?"

It was not Wilkes who answered. The answer came—I am recording precisely what happened, exaggerating nothing, omitting nothing salient from this unprecedented adventure—the reply came to me mentally, as though by some unanticipated

telepathy, quite clearly enunciated, registering itself unmistakably in my inner-consciousness.

"Sit tight!" it said, "I'm with you here on this end of things."

And the "voice" which recorded itself in my brain, a calm, efficient kind of voice, a voice which reached out its intense helpfulness and sympathy to us, waifs of some inchoate void, a voice replete with reassurance, with steady confidence, a voice which healed the raw wounds of the beleaguered soul—was the voice of Pelletier.

8

PELLETIER STANDING BY! I cannot hope to reproduce and set down here the immeasurable comfort of it.

I stood up, Wilkes rising groaningly at the same time, a laborious, painful process, and, reeling on my two feet as I struggled for and finally established my normal balance, looked about me.

We stood, to my mounting surprise, on a stone-flagged pavement. About us rose inner walls of smoothed stone. We were in a room about sixteen by twenty feet in size, lighted by an open doorway and by six windows symmetrically placed along the side walls, and unglazed. The light which flooded the room through these vents was plainly that of late afternoon. Simultaneously we stepped over to the wide-open doorway and looked out.

Before us waved the dignified foliage of a mahogany grove, thickly interspersed with ceiba trees, its near edge gracious with the brave show of flowering shrubs in full blossom—small white flowers which smelled like the Cape Jessamine. I had only just taken in these features when I felt Wilkes' grip on my arm from where he stood, just behind me and a little to one side. His voice was little more than a whisper:

"We're— Oh, God!— Canevin! Look, Canevin, look! We're back on Earth!" His whispered words broke in a succession of hysterical dry sobs, and, as I laid my arm about the poor fellow's

heaving shoulders, I felt the unchecked tears running down my own face.

We stepped out side by side after a minute or two, and stood there, once more on true earth, in the pleasant silence of late afternoon and with the fragrance of those flowering shrubs pouring itself over everything. It was a delicate aroma, grateful and refreshing. We said nothing. We spent this quiet interval in some sort of silent thanksgiving.

And, curiously, Wilkes' oddly phrased question came forcibly into my mind: "Is it Allah—or what?" I remembered, standing there in that pleasant, remote garden with its white flowers, an evening spent over a pair of pipes in the austere study of an old friend, Professor Harvey Vanderbogart, a brilliant young Orientalist, since dead. Vanderbogart, I remembered very clearly, had been speaking of one of the Moslem theologians, Al Ghazzali. He had quoted me a strange passage from the magnum opus of that medieval Saracen, a treatise well known to scholars as *The Precious Pearl.* I could even call back into my mind with the smell of the tobacco and the breeze blowing Vanderbogart's dull reddish window curtains, the resonance of his serious, declaiming voice:

"... the soul of man passeth out of his body, and this soul is of the shape and size of a bee ... The Lord Allah holdeth this soul of man between His thumb and finger, and Allah bringeth it close before His eyes, and Allah, holdeth it at the length of His arm, and Allah saith: 'Some are in the Garden—and I care not; and some are in the Fire—and I care not ...!' "

Poor Vanderbogart had been dead many years, a most worthy and lovable fellow and a fine scholar. May he rest in peace! Doubtless he is reaping his reward of a blameless life, in the Garden.

And here, somewhere on Earth, which was, for the time being, quite enough for us to know, stood Wilkes and I, also in a garden, tremulously grateful to be alive, and on our Mother Earth, glad indeed of this respite as it seemed to us; free, for the time being, of the malevolent caprice of that Power from Whose baleful

control, we, poor fools, supposed that we might have been, as it were carelessly, released.

Our momentary illusion of security was strangely shattered.

Without any preliminary warning of any kind, those great trees before us on the other edge of the row of flowering bushes made deep obeisance all together in their deeply rooted rows, in our direction, as a great wind tore rudely through them, hurling us backward like chips of cork before a hurricane, whipping us savagely with the strong twigs of the uprooted shrubs pelting us, ironically, with a myriad detached blossoms. This fearsome surge of living air smote us back through the wide doorway and landed us in the middle of that compact stone room, and died as abruptly, leaving us, almost literally breathless, and reeling after our dislocated balance.

There was, it occurred to me fragmentarily and with a poignant acuteness, a disastrous certainty brooking no mental denial, none of the benign carelessness of Allah about this Adversary of ours! His was, plainly enough, an active maleficence. He had no intention of allowing us quietly, unobtrusively, to slip away. If we had been landed once more on Earth, it was in no sense a release– no more than the cat releases the mouse save to add some infinitesimal mental torture to that pitiful little creature's dash for freedom, ending in the thrust of those ruthless retractile claws.

Brief respites, the subsequent crushing of our very souls by that imponderable Force!

We pulled ourselves together, Wilkes and I, there in that austere little stone room, and, in the breathless calm which had followed that astounding clap of air-force, we found oursèlves racked to a very high degree of nervous tension. We stood there, and pumped laboriously the dead, heavy air into our laboring lungs in great gasping breaths. It was as though a vacuum had, for long moments, replaced the warm fresh air of a tropical midafternoon. The stone room's floor was thickly sewn with those delicate white blooms, their odor now no longer refreshing; rather an overpowering additional element now, in the sultry burning air.

Then the center of the rearmost end wall began to move, revealing another doorway the size of that which led outside into the little garden now denuded of its blooms. As the first heavy, grating crunching ushered this new fact into our keyed-up joint consciousness, we turned sharply toward that wall, now parting, moving back as though on itself.

We looked through, into what seemed an endless, dim-lit vaulted arena of some forgotten worship, into the lofty nave of a titanic cathedral, through dim, dust-laden distances along a level floor of stone to where at an immense distance shimmered such an altar as the Titans might have erected to Jupiter, an altar of shining white stone and flanked by a chiseled figure of a young man, kneeling on one knee, and holding poised on that knee a vast cornucopialike jar, for all the world, as I envisaged it, like a statue of zodiacal Aquarius.

Greatly intrigued, Wilkes and I walked through the doorway out of our stone anterooms, into the colossal structure which towered far, far above into dimness, and straight across the stone-flagged nave toward this unexpected and alluring shrine; glowing up ahead there in all the comeliness of its ancient chaste beauty.

That the architecture here, including the elaborate ornamentation, was that of those same early Mayas concerning whom Pelletier had discoursed so learnedly, there could be no possible question. Here, plainly, was a very ancient and thoroughly authentic survival, intact, of the notable building propensity of that early people, The First Mayas of the High Culture, the founders of the race and its various empires in these Western-world settlements, the predecessors of the present surviving and degenerate inhabitants. Here, about us, remained the work of that cryptic civilization which had so unaccountably disappeared off this planet's face, leaving their enduring stone monuments, their veritable handiwork, developed, sophisticated, with its strange wealth of ornamentation behind them as an insoluble riddle for the archeologists.

That this stupendous structure was a survival from a hoary antiquity there was all about us abundant and convincing

evidence. I knew enough of the general subject to be acutely aware of that, that this represented the building principles of the earliest period—the high point, as I understood the matter, of the most notable of the successive Maya civilizations. That the building had stood empty and unused for some incalculable period in time was equally evidenced by various facts. One of these, unmistakable, was the thick blanket of fine dust which lay, literally inches thick, over everything; dust through which we were obliged to plod as though over the trackless surface of some roofed and ceiled Sahara; dust which rose in choking clouds behind and about us as we pressed forward toward that distant altar and its glorious statue.

That figure of the youth with his votive jar towered up ahead of us there, white, glistening, beautiful—and the dust of uncounted centuries which lay inches thick upon its many upper, bearing, surfaces such as offered support to its impalpability, caused the heroic figure to stand out in a deeply enhanced and accentuated perspective, lending to it strange highlights in shining contrast to the very dust's thick, quasi-shadows; a veritable perfection of shading such as no sculptor of this world could hope to rival.

We walked, necessarily rather slowly, on and forward toward the altar and statue, their beauty and symmetry becoming more and more clearly apparent as our progress brought them closer and closer within the middle range of our vision.

9

NATURALLY ENOUGH, I had pondered deeply upon the whole affair in which we were involved, in those intervals—such as our long night walk—as had been afforded us between the various actual "attacks" of the Power that held us in its grip. I had, of course, put two and two together again and again in the unceasing human mental process of effort to make problematical two-and-two yield the satisfying four of a solution.

This process, had, of course, included the consideration of many matters, such as the possible connection between the

existence of the Great Power and that same ancient Maya civilization; the basic facts, the original reasons back of the terror of those massed aborigines swarming in their forest cover all about the tree-circle; the placing in their appropriate categories of the phenomena of the Great Body; that mechanical regular pulsation which could only be the throbbing of *Its* circulatory fluids—Ichor was the classical term, I remembered, for the blood of a god; the "ravines" which crossed each other like shallow valleys and which were the "lines" upon that primordial palm; the hirsute growth adorning that titanic forearm which had glistened like metallic treeboles as the morning sun shone down that slope, and which moved their tapering tops in the breeze from the cosmic nostrils.

All such as these, and various other details, I had, I say, attempted mentally to resolve, to adjust to their right and logical places and settings; to work, that is, mentally, into some coherent unity, literal or cosmic.

The process had included the element of worship. The gods and demigods of deep antiquity had had their worshipers, their devotees diabolic or human, and this is an integral part, an essential, of their now only vaguely comprehended existence; since day and night struggled for primordial precedence in the dim gestation of time.

That those prehistoric, highly civilized Maya forebears might have been worshipers of this particular Power (which, as we had had forced upon our attention, had somehow localized *Its* last stand here in these modern times—that Great Circle; the tree in its center as *Its* bridge to and from this world of ours) was a possibility which had long since occurred to me. That such a possibility might have some bearing upon that scientific puzzle which centered about their remote and simultaneous disappearance, had, I am sure, also occurred to me at that time. To that problem, which had barely come under my mental scrutiny because it was not central in terms of our predicament, I had, I am equally sure, given no particular thought.

That there could, in the nature of the case, be any evidence—"documentary" or merely archeological—had not

entered my mind. I did wonder about it now, however, as we two plodded forward through those choking dust clouds, slowly yet surely onward toward what seemed to have been a major shrine of such forgotten worship, if, indeed, what I suspected had ever had its place upon this planet.

For one thing, the worshipers themselves would by now have been dust these twenty centuries; perhaps, indeed, the once-animated basis of this very powder which swirled and eddied about us two, up from underfoot as we pushed forward laboriously toward the shrine. There, in its forgotten heyday, that worship had sent swirling and eddying upward in active spirals incense compounded of the native tree-gums; the balsams and *olibana,* the styrax and powdered sweet-leaves of the environing forests; incense bearing upward in its votive clouds the aspirations of an antiquity as remote as that of the Roman Augurs, and to a deity fiercer, more inscrutable, than Olympian Jove.

It would, indeed, have been a relief to us to see some worshipers now, human beings, even though, devoted as they might be to their deity in Whose hostile power we were held, such personages should prove correspondingly hostile to us. This unrelenting, unrelieved god-and-victim situation was a truly desperate one. Within its terms—as I have elsewhere tried to make clear—we felt ourselves helpless. There was nothing to strike against! A man, however resolute, cannot, in the very nature of things, contend with a Power of this kind! Useless mere courage, fortitude. Even the possession of a body stalwart, inured by exercise and constant usage against conflict and the deadly fatigue of intensive competitive effort, is no match for hurricanes—powerless against a Force which could be mistaken for a major geographical division of land!

Despite the fact that we had gone without rest or sleep, to say nothing of food and water for a much longer period that was our common cŭstom; apart, too, from the fact that these sound bodies of ours were just then rather severely strained and racked from the cosmic manhandling to which we had been subjected; leaving wholly out of consideration the stresses which had worn

thin our nervous resistance—taking into consideration all these factors which told against us, I know that both of us would have welcomed any contact, even though it should involve conflict of the most drastic kind, with human beings, people like ourselves. They might be, for all of us, out of any age, past or present; of any degree of rudeness, of any lack of civilization, in any numbers—just so that they be human.

We did not know then—certainly I did not, and Wilkes was saying nothing—what lay in wait for us, just around the corner of time, so to speak!

10

WE HAD BY NOW TRAVERSED about half of the distance between the anteroom and the altar. Behind us, a heavy, weaving, tenuous cloud of the fine dust we had disturbed hung like a gray, nebulous curtain between us and the towering rearward end wall of that enormous fane. Ahead now the altar glowed, jewel-like, in the slanting rays of a declining sun, rays which appeared to fall through some high opening as yet invisible to us. The genuflecting figure I have named Aquarius gleamed, too, gloriously, in its refined, heroic contours—a thing of such pure beauty as to cause the beholder to catch his breath.

About us all things were utterly silent, a dead stillness, like the settled, lifeless quiet of some abandoned tomb. Even our own footfalls, muffled in the thick dust of the marching centuries, registered no audible sound.

And then, with the rude abruptness which seemed to characterize every manifestation of that anachronistic divinity, that survival out of an unfriendly past, there came without any warning the deep, soul-stirring, contrapuntal beat of a vast gong. This tremendous note poured itself into this dead world, this arid arena of a forgotten worship; the sudden, pulsing atmosphere of renewal, of life itself.

We stopped there in our tracks and the fine dust rose all about us like gray cumulus. We looked, we listened, and all about us the quickening air became alive. Then the vibrating, metallic clangor

reverberated afresh and the atmosphere was electrified into pulsing animation; an unmistakable, palpable sense of fervid, hastening activity. We stood there, in that altered environment, tense, strained, every nerve and every faculty aroused as though by an unmistakable abrupt challenge. The altar seemed to coruscate in this new atmosphere. The zodiacal figure of Aquarius gleamed afresh in the sun's slanting rays with a poignant, unearthly beauty.

The slow, shattering sub-bass of the gong reverberated a third time, its mighty, overtonic echoes charging the revived air with a challenging summons; and, before these had wholly died away and silence above the dust clouds established itself, out from some point beside and beyond the altar there emerged a slow-moving procession of men in long, dignified garments, in hierarchial vesture, walking gravely, two and two.

We watched breathlessly. Here, at long last, was the fulfilment of that half-formulated wish. Human beings! Here were worshipers: tall, stalwart men; great, bearded men, warriors in seeming; bronzed, great-thewed hierophants, bearing strange instruments, the paraphernalia of some remote ritual – wands and metal cressets; chained thuribles, naviculae, long cornucopiae, like that upon the flexed knee of Aquarius; harsh-sounding systra, tinkling triangles, netted rattles strung with small, sweet-chiming bells; salsalim, castanets, clanging cymbals; great rams' horns banded with plates of shining fresh gold; enormous, fanlike implements of a substance like elephants' hide; a gilt canopy, swaying on ebony poles, ponderous, its fringes powdered with jewels, sheltering a votive bullock, its wide horns buried beneath looped garlands. This procession moved gravely toward the altar, an endless stream of grave, bearded men, until, as we watched, stultified, wondering, the space about it became finally filled, and the slow-moving, endless-seeming throng, women and girls among the men now, turned toward us, pouring deliberately into the forepart of the nave.

It was, after this change in the course of the procession's objective, only a matter of seconds before we were seen. There was no possibility of retreat, nothing whatever behind which we

might have concealed ourselves. We could, of course, have lain down, burrowing in the dust, and so, perhaps, have delayed the instant of discovery. But that did not occur to either of us. Such a course would, too, have been quite futile. Enormous as was this vast fane—built, it appeared, to accommodate worshipers in their thousands—there were here, thronging in endlessly, more than enough to fill it to suffocation.

There was, once we were observed, not so much as an instant's hesitation, a moment's respite for us. Between the instant when the foremost of that great throng perceived us, strangers, outlanders, and the instantaneous corporate cry of rage which rose from a thousand throats, there was not time for us to clasp hands in a futile gesture of farewell. They rushed us without any other preliminary than that roar of fierce, primitive anger. The dust under that mass movement of sandaled feet rose in an opaque cloud which obscured the altar. Out of that thick, mephitic cloud they came at us, brandishing thick, metallic, macelike clubs, great bronze swords, obvious, menacing in that dust-dim air, the rapidly-failing light of the sun – deadly blades, thirsting for our blood.

"Back to back, as soon as they surround us," I hurled in Wilkes' ear, but I had not completed that brief counsel of despair when Wilkes, who produced from somewhere a small, flat automatic pistol, had abruptly dropped in his tracks a huge bearded warrior, who, by reason of a greatly superior fleetness of foot, had by far outdistanced the others. This giant fell within fifteen feet of us. The nearest of the others, also bounding along well in advance of the pack, was perhaps thirty feet distant. I had time to plunge forward and seize out of a great hairy fist the enormous bronze sword of this our first casualty. With this it was my plan to rush back to where Wilkes stood, sighting calmly along his pistol barrel, as I glimpsed him, and make together some sort of stand.

The second runner was nearly on top of me, however, before I could straighten up and try to fell him with this untried weapon. Wilkes shot him through the middle precisely as he was about to bring down his macelike weapon across my skull. I secured the

mace before any of the others out of that frenzied horde was within striking distance, and leaped back through the now boiling dust clouds to Wilkes' side. This was a trifle better, though obviously hopeless against those odds. I straightened myself, caught my balance, turned to face the rush beside Wilkes.

"Good for five more, anyhow!" said Wilkes calmly, firing past me twice in quick succession. I was turned about and again facing the oncoming rush in time to see two more of them sinking down. I thrust choice of the two primitive weapons I had secured toward Wilkes. He snatched the mace in his left hand, fired his remaining three shots, hurled the pistol into the thick of the vanguard; and then, shifting the mace to his right hand while I made my huge sword sing through the dust, we faced the attack.

We possessed jointly the single advantage of comparative lightness. Our massed opponents were uniformly men of literally huge stature, heroic-looking fellows, stalwart, bulky, deadly serious in this business of killing!

Unquestionably, as I think back over that conflict, too much emphasis cannot be placed upon this single advantage of lightness, mobility, to which I have just alluded. Otherwise, had we not been able to move about very much more rapidly than our opponents, that fight would have been finished, with our offhand slaughter, in a matter of seconds! The odds were—"overwhelming" is not the word. "Ridiculous" comes nearer to it. Probably a thousand of the enormous warriors were using their utmost endeavor to close in upon and slaughter two men. But they necessarily got inextricably tangled up together for that very reason. If they had delegated two or three of their number to attend to Wilkes and me while the others merely stood by, there can be no question but what they would have accomplished their end, and in a very brief period of time.

The bulk, and the consequent relative awkwardness of the individual warriors, too, counted powerfully in our favor. We were, thus, both jointly infinitely more mobile than the huddled phalanx which we confronted, and individually as well when compared, man for man, to even the lightest of our opponents when considered singly. They got into each others' way through

the sheer directness of their massed attack, and of this circumstance which counted so heavily in our favor we took the fullest advantage. The great warriors, too, appeared to pay no attention either to their own dead, which began to pile up after a few moments of that intensive affray, and these, as they increased, served to protect us and to cause them, intent only on reaching us, to stumble broadcast. They seemed to know nothing of defensive fighting.

We plunged, both of us, into that fight, berserk, with no other idea but that this was the inevitable, the predestined end; no other idea than that we were going out like men—and with as much company as possible for whatever Stygian process might await us beyond the doors of that imminent death.

It was like a preface to Valhalla, that fight! In that remote edge of my brain which people call "the back of the mind," I remember the thought cropping up that such combat as this was an affair of utter futility! We had no shadow of misunderstanding with these towering, swarming legionaries out of some unguessed backwater of antiquity. They, certainly, apart from their primitive urges, had no reason for attacking us. Yet, I confess, I went into that shambles with a sense of relief, with a quite definite satisfaction, a gusto! These great, truculent, brown, bearded creatures were subjects of, part and parcel with, that hostile demigod, that basic anachronism, Who was persecuting us. Striking at them, His Myrmidons, meant blows at Him—shrewd blows they were . . . .

We struck out, Wilkes and I. I found my great awkward-looking weapon surprisingly well-balanced and keen. It was only after I had sheared through that first torso, clear through the big neck muscles and ribs of my first actual opponent, that I realized what a sword could be! I set my teeth. Vague, hereditary instincts burgeoned in my blood-quickened mentality. I went half mad with the urge to slay. I exulted as my great sword found its mark, struck home again and yet again. Half-articulate cries burst through my compressed lips; terrible thoughts, a fearful, supporting self-confidence boiled in my mind as I fought, and thrust, and swung; vague instincts freshly

quickened into seething life and power; the inheritance from countless Nordic forebears, men who were men indeed, heroes of song and saga, men of my clan who had fought their relentless way to chieftainship, men who fought with claymores.

There came over me a terrible swift surge of security, of certainty, of appalling confidence. I was more than a man. I, too, was a god, empowered with the achievements of those old Canevins who had feared neither man nor devil in the ancient eras of the clan's glory in the field of red battle—a sense of strange happiness, of fulfilment, of some deep destiny coming into its own like the surging up of a great tide. This, I suppose, is what people name the blood-lust. I do not know. I only know that I settled down to fighting, my brain alert, my arm wielding the sword tirelessly, my feet and legs balancing me for the great shearing strokes with which I cleared space after recurrent space about me and caused the mounded dead to make a bulwark between me and those indefatigable huge brutes who pressed on and on, filling up the ranks of their cloven, sinking colleagues.

Heredity laid its heavy hand upon me as I slew right and left and always before me. It was like some destiny, I say, fulfilling itself. Strange cries, deep, primitive slogans burst from my lips. I pressed upon those before me—we were, of course, surrounded—and, feeling the comradeship of Wilkes at my back, as he swung and lashed out with that metal club taking his toll of brains and crackling skulls, I surged into a song, a vast war shout, rushing upon the ever-renewed front of my enemies, flailing the great sword through yielding flesh and resistant bone and sinew, forward, ever forward into a very fulfilment and epitome of slaughter. From time to time one or another would reach, and wound me, but the blood of the ancient fighting clan of Canevin heeded not.

My bronze sword drank deep as it sheared insatiable through tissue and tendon. Before me, an oriflamme, flared a blood-red mist in that dank shambles where blood mingled with paralyzing dust clouds. It was basic; hand-to-hand; pure conflict. My soul exulted and sang as I ploughed forward into the thick of it, Wilkes' staccato "Ha!" as his metal club went home, punctuating

the rhythm of my terrible strokes against that herded phalanx. I struck and struck, and the sword drank and drank.

I strode among heaped bodies now, seeking foot leverage, a greater purchase for my blows. Against these heart-lifting odds, heedless of death, feeling none of the gashes and bruises I received, I strove, in a still-mounting fury of utter destruction. I drove them before me in scores, in hundreds. . . .

Then, insistent, paralyzing, came the last stroke, the shattering reverberation of the great gong.

11

WITH THAT COMPELLING STROKE, like the call of Fate, the conflict died all about me. The tense, striving fury dropped away from the distorted faces before me. Their weapons fell. I heard Wilkes' quick "Ha!" as his last blow went home on a crumpling skull, and then my sword hung idle all at once in my scarlet hand; the pressure of the circle about us relaxed, fell away to nothing. I breathed again without those choking gasps through air fouled with the fetor of dust and blood — old dust, newly-shed blood. We stood together, still back to back, our strained hearts pumping wildly, our red vision clearing. We stood near the very rearmost wall now, such had been the pressure into the nave.

We turned, as though by an agreement, and looked into each other's eyes. Then, as a surge of chanted song far up by the altar inaugurated this worship which was beginning, which had taken from us the attention of that mad horde, we slipped quietly out through the anteroom, and into the garden now tremulous with the verge of dusk upon it, side by side, on the short grass, we lay down upon our faces, and relaxed our sorely taxed bodies, turned, and spoke quietly to each other, and gazed up at the friendly stars, and closed our eyes, and fell at once into the quick deep sleep of complete and utter exhaustion.

It was Wilkes who shook me awake. It was pitch dark, or nearly so, the moon being at the moment obscured under clouds. A light, refreshing rain was falling, and my soaking wetness from

head to foot evidenced a heavier shower through which both of us had slept. My wounds and bruises from that terrific melee ached and burned and throbbed. Yet I had lost little blood, it appeared, and when I stood up and had moved about somewhat, my usual agility seemed quite fully restored. The phosphorus-painted dial of my wrist-watch -- which had survived that shambles intact—showed that it was half past four in the morning.

"I've been scouting around," explained Wilkes. "It isn't so bad in this light after you've got used to it a bit. I've discovered a sapodilla tree. That's why I awakened you, Canevin—thought you could do with a bit to eat, what?"

He held out four of the round, dull-brown fruits which look like Irish potatoes. I took them eagerly, the first food in many hours. I do not recall a more satisfactory meal at any time in my life.

Greatly refreshed, I washed my hands in the rain and wiped them clean on the short wet grass. Wilkes was speaking again:

"Those people, Canevin! There are no such people in the world, today—except here, I believe, What do you thank? That is, if you've had time to think after that. Good God, man, were you a gladiator in some past existence! But, to get back to those people in there. It seems to me that—well, either those are the old-time Mayas, surviving just in this spot, wherever it may be, or else—do you suppose He could—er —make them immortal, something of the sort, what? Sounds ridiculous. I grant you that, of course, but then, this whole affair is . . ." He paused, leaving me to fill in the adjective. I stepped on something hard. I stooped down, picked up the enormous sword which I had carried out here to the garden when we had left the temple last night. I balanced it in my hand. I looked at Wilkes in the still dim light.

"It's really, in a sense, the greatest puzzle of all," I said reflectively. "You're right, of course. No question about it, man! Those people were—well, anything but what I'd call contemporaries of ours. I'd almost be inclined to say that the immortality alternative gets my vote."

"Let's go back and take a look for ourselves," said Wilkes. "We

don't seem, somehow, to have very much choice, this trip. Now seems to be one of the slack moments. Let's go back inside there, get up behind that altar and statue, and see what's there, in that place they all marched out from, what? Everything seems quieted down now inside; has been for hours on end, I'd say. We weren't molested while we slept through all that rain."

I nodded. A man can only die once, and the Power could, certainly, do as it wished with us. The rain ended, as tropical showers end, abruptly. The sweet odor of some flowering shrub poured itself out. The clouds passed from before the moon.

"Right," said I. "Let's get going." And, without another word, we entered the stone anteroom, walked across it to where the doorway had opened into the temple, and—stopped there. The door was shut now. It was not, in the dim moonlight which filtered through the openings, even perceptible now. There was simply nothing to be seen there, not so much as a chink in the solid masonry of the wall, to indicate that there was a door.

"We'll have to work around to it from the outside," said Wilkes, after we had stood awhile in baffled silence. "There must be a way."

I laughed. "They say that 'where there's a will there's a way,' " I quoted. "Well, let's try it, outside," answered Wilkes; and we walked out into the garden again.

There was no particular difficulty about finding that "way." We simply walked around the end of the small structure I have called the anteroom and followed along the almost endlessly high, blank stone-mason work of the temple's outside sheathing. The walking was not difficult, the growth being chiefly low shrubs. At last we came to the end of the temple wall, and turned the sharp corner it made at the beginning of a slight slope which ran down very gradually in the same direction in which we had been walking.

To our considerable surprise, for we had thought of nothing like this, there stretched away from us, farther than we could see in the moonlight broken by small, drifting clouds of the cirrus variety, a succession of other buildings, all of them obviously of that same early-civilization period of the first Maya empire,

rounded structures for the most part, carrying the typical stone arrangement and ornamentation. Enormous as was the great temple, the area occupied by these massed and crowded buildings, close-standing, majestic in their heavy, solid grandeur, was far greater. The nearest, less than half the height of the towering temple side walls, was joined onto the temple itself, and stretched away virtually out of our sight. We stood and looked up at this.

"Undoubtedly," I agreed, standing beside him and looking up at the solid masonry, its massive lines somewhat broken, dignified and beautiful in the fickle, transient moonlight.

Not a sound, not a whisper, even from a night insect, broke the deathly stillness. I remembered the Great Circle.

"It's His territory, right enough," I murmured; and Wilkes nodded.

"Closed for the season!" he said lightly, and lit a cigarette.

I sat down beside Wilkes and looked for my cigarette case. I had left it in the pocket of my drill jacket when I took it off and laid it on the ground beside Pelletier before going up the tree. Curiously, in all this time that had elapsed I had not thought of smoking. Wilkes handed me his case, and we sat there side by side saying nothing. A glance down at the heavy sword which I had laid across my knees reminded me of our current mission.

"We'll have to go all the way to the end of this masonry-work at least," I said, "before we can get into the inclosure!"

Wilkes tossed away the stub of his cigarette, stood up, and stretched his arms.

"All right," said he, "let's do it."

12

IT TOOK US A quarter of an hour of steady walking before we came to a corner. We turned this, walked past that enormous building's end, and emerged in a kind of open space much like the quadrangle of a modern university, only many times larger in area, surrounded by more buildings dim in the present light, one side bounded by the edge of the great structure we had been

skirting. The moonlight shone somewhat brighter on this side, against that long plain wall of masonry.

Suddenly Wilkes caught me by the arm. He uttered a typically British expletive.

"My hat!" said Wilkes, "Look, Canevin! There isn't a window in the place!"

We stood looking up at the building.

"Curious," commented Wilkes. "Other old Maya architecture has windows--that little anteroom effect we called in at before going into the temple has windows, both sides. Why not this?"

"Perhaps it's a kind of storehouse," I suggested. "If so, it wouldn't need windows."

"I doubt that--sort of instinct, perhaps," returned Wilkes. "All along I've had the idea that the--er--congregation came out of this into the temple. It's attached--we saw that outside there, built right onto it; we had to walk around it on just that account."

"If you're right," I said, reflecting, "if there are people in there--well, then they don't need windows--light."

"If so, why?" threw out Wilkes; and I had no answer.

We stood staring up at the blank, unornamental, solid wall.

"Curious!" vouchsafed Wilkes again. "Curious, no end!" Then: "Might bear out my idea, rather--you remember, Canevin? That 'immortality' idea I mean. If He has them--er--preserved, so to speak, ready to be revived, started going when He wants them, or *needs* them, what? As you remarked, they weren't exactly 'contemporaries' of ours! He's been going at this whole affair His own way, all through; not the way we human beings would go at it. If you ask me, He--er--needed them to scrag us in there, in the temple I mean. They tried, you know! Failed, rather! We're still on deck, Canevin! And, back of that--why, for the sake of argument, did He set us down here, on Earth once more, but not at the same old stand, not where we parked the old bus, in that circle of grass, under that tree? Perhaps it's a small matter but--well, why, Canevin? Why here, I mean to say, rather than there? It's a point to consider at any rate. Looks to me, if you ask me, as though He

were trying, in His own peculiar way, to do us in, and had, so far, failed."

I pondered over this long speech of Wilkes', the longest I had heard him make. He was, like many engineering fellows, inclined to be monosyllabic rather than garrulous. It was, I thought, a curious piece of reasoning. Yet, anything coming from this stanch comrade in a pinch such as he had proved himself to be, was worth consideration. It might be what he called "instinct," or indeed, anything. It might be the truth.

I was very far from realizing at that moment—and so, too, I think, was Wilkes himself, despite this curiously suggestive set of ideas—that within a very short time this utterly strange adventure upon which we were embarked was to give us its final, and, thoughtfully considered, perhaps its most poignant, surprise. Even warned as I should have been by Wilkes' strange surmise, I was quite unprepared for what we found inside.

We proceeded slowly along what I have called the inner wall of the vast structure which joined the temple at its farther end. We walked for minute after minute along beside it, always glancing up at it, constantly on the lookout for an entrance. The walls remained entirely blank, without either apertures or ornamentation. The huge building might, to all appearances, have been some prehistoric warehouse or granary.

At last we came to its end, the end structurally joined onto the temple's rearmost wall. We walked directly up to this point, where the two structures made a sharp corner.

There was no entrance except, presumably, through the temple, from the inside, there behind the altar. We had had half an hour's walk around these massive survivals of ancient architecture for nothing. It was five three by my watch in the moon's clear light. The clouds had retreated toward the horizon by now, as we stood there at that corner, baffled.

We turned, rather wearily now, away at right angles from our course just finished, and plodded along the grassy ground under the towering rear wall of the temple.

And, halfway along it, we came to an opening, an arched

doorway without a door. We stopped, point-blank, and looked at each other.

"Shall we . . .?" whispered Wilkes.

I nodded, and stepped through, the great sword, which I had been carrying like a musket over my shoulder, now gripped, business-fashion, in my right hand.

We stepped through into an ambulatory, a semicircular passageway behind the altar. We turned to our left, in the direction of the temple's corner against which was built the building we had been encircling, walking once more through heaped dust such as had clogged the nave, our footfalls soundless in an equally soundless environment.

Emerging from that semicircular course at the altar's side, we were able to see from this coign of vantage the overhead opening through which the rays of the late-afternoon sun had streamed down the day before. This was a wide space left vacant in the roofing, far above, overhung by what seemed another roof-structure twenty or thirty feet higher up, an arrangement plainly designed to keep out the rain while letting in the rays of the declining sun.

Now, in the moonlight of pre-dawn, both altar and statue took on an unearthly beauty. We stood rapt, looking along the altar directly toward the face of the statue.

This time it was I who jogged Wilkes' elbow.

"It's a quarter past five," I warned him. "If we're going to get a look at those people, we'd better do it now, before daylight. We haven't very long. And if they're—well, regular people, ordinary human beings, a segregated nation and *not*—er—'embalmed,' or whatever it is that you had in mind, we'd best take a quick glance and get away before they are awake!"

We turned away from those shimmering, pale glories which were the altar and the statue, the one jeweled, the other shining, resplendent, toward the predicated passageway that must lead out of the temple to where its erstwhile worshipers took their repose.

We could have told where it began if we had been blind men, by the feel of the heavily-trodden dust under our feet, dust not

heaped and soft as we had experienced it--dust matted into the consistency of felt by the pressure of ten thousand feet.

Along that carpet over the stone flooring of a wide passageway we walked, warily now, not knowing what we might confront, toward a high, wide archway which marked the entrance proper into the windowless barrack or storehouse we had so lately scrutinized.

Here the moonlight shone scantily. We could not see very far before us, but we could see far enough to show us what kind of place it was into whose purlieus we had penetrated. We paused, just beyond the archway, paused and looked . . . There, in that storehouse laid out before us as far as the dim moonlight permitted our vision to reach, straight before us until their regular ranks were no longer visible except to the agitated eye of the mind, lay endless, regularly spaced rows of bodies, endless rows, rank upon serried rank; still, motionless, mummylike, in the ineffable calm of latency; life suspended; life merged into one vast, incalculable coma. This was a storehouse indeed, in very fact: the last abiding place of those old Mayas of the first civilization, that classical puzzle of the archeologists—a puzzle no longer to Wilkes and me of all modern men; a civilization, a nation, in bond to the Power that still held us in an ironical, unrelenting, grasp—to that One Whom these very ancients worshipped and propitiated, the Prince of the Powers of the Air . . .

13

WITHOUT A WORD we hastened out of that grim house of a living death and back into the temple, and, with no more than a glance toward the altar and statue, hurried silently back through the ambulatory and out through the doorless archway again into the breaking dawn of another day, under the fading stars of a new morning.

And, as we emerged, toward us, diagonally across what I have called the "quadrangle," in regular formation, disciplined, there marched unfaltering, resolute, a vast horde of tall, brown men,

led by two figures who stepped gravely in their van, ahead of those serried thousands. He on the left was a tall, brown man of majestic carriage, bearing in his hand a small burning torch, young, yet of a commanding dignity as one used to rule. Upon the right marched beside him a heavy, lumbering figure, who walked wearily, yet not without a certain heavy dignity of his own, a figure of a certain familiarity—the figure of Pelletier!

My immediate instinct was to cry out in sudden relief, to rush incontinently forward. I felt suddenly as though my heart would burst Pelletier, of all the men this old planet could possibly produce, here! Pelletier, the most welcome sight . . . .

I could not have done so, however, even though I had actually yielded to that impulse I have named. For Pelletier was calling out to me, in a curious kind of voice, I noted at once, with some puzzlement—in a kind of rude, improvised chant.

"Steady, Canevin, steady does it, as the British Navy says! Walk toward us, both of you, side by side; stand up straight; make it as dignified as you know how—slow; like two big guns conferring a favor on the populace. Pay no attention to anybody but me. Stop in front of me. We'll bow to each other; not too low. Then, when *He* bows, put your hands on his head—like a blessing, do you understand? On this big fellow beside me, I mean. Don't botch it now, either of you. It's important . . . . Good! That's the ticket! Keep it up now; carry the whole works through just the way I'm telling you."

We carried out these amazing instructions to the letter. They were, of course, apart from the general idea of making an impression on Pelletier's inexplicable following, quite unintelligible to us. But, we went through with them precisely according to these weird, chanted instructions—like the directions of some madman, a paranoiac for choice! "Delusions of grandeur!" The old phrase came inevitably into my mind. Even the young chieftain did his part, kneeling with gravity before us as soon as we had finished our salutation to Pelletier, and he had majestically returned it.

Immediately after these ceremonial performances which were received in a solemn silence by the army—for the orderly ranks

were numerous enough to deserve such a distinctive title—Pelletier drew us aside and spoke with haste tempering his gravity.

"I'll explain all this later. Tell me, first, how long have you been in this place?"

We told him we had spent the night here and started to outline our adventures, but Pelletier cut in.

"Another time," he said curtly. "This is vital, pressing. Is there anything here—I don't know, precisely, how to make clear exactly what I mean: you'll have to use your wits; I haven't the time to hold a long palaver now, and we mustn't waste a minute—anything, I mean, that would correspond to that tree you fellows went up; something, in other words, that would serve—er—Him as a bridge, a means of access to Earth? I don't know how to make it any clearer. Maybe you catch what I mean."

"There's a temple back of us," said Wilkes, "with an altar—"

"And a statue," I finished for him, "a magnificient thing, heroic in size; looks for all the world like the figure of Aquarius in the signs of the zodiac. Possibly—"

"Take us straight to it," commanded Pelletier, and turned and spoke rapidly to the brown chieftain in sonorous Spanish. He told him to detach one hundred or more of his most reliable warriors and follow us without the least delay, and to this task the young leader forthwith addressed himself. Within two minutes, so unquestioned appeared to be his authority, this picked company was following us at the double back to the temple entrance, back along the curving ambulatory, back to the vicinity of the altar and statue.

We paused at the point where these first became visible, and Pelletier looked at the statue for a long instant.

"The perfect focus!" he muttered, and turned and addressed the chieftain once more.

"Advance with us in close order," he commanded, "to the figure of the man holding the vessel. Draw up the men beside it, on this side, and when I give you the signal, push it over on its side!"

This order, immediately passed on to the Indians, was set in motion without delay, the stalwart fellows crowding toward the statue eagerly.

We were almost beside the statue when the sudden roar of the great gong, almost beside us, shattered the quiet air. I winced, and so did Wilkes, and the Indians stopped in their tracks. Automatically I gripped the hilt of my bronze sword as I felt Wilkes' steadying hand close on my shoulder.

Then Pelletier raised his great booming voice and began to sing in Spanish, something about "the conquering fire"! He almost literally pushed that group of Indians toward their appointed task. Not without a certain hesitation, a reluctance, I thought, they lined up beside the statue obediently, yet with rolled eyes and fearful glances in all directions, indicating that panic lay only a little way below their corporate surface of strict obedience. Then, at Pelletier's spoken signal, the massed group heaved, all together. The great statue moved, gratingly, on its solid foundation.

"Again!" cried Pelletier, and hurled his own weight and bulk into the balance.

The statue swayed this time, hung balanced precariously, then toppled over on its farther side in a shattering crash which detached the cornucopia and the beautifully modeled arms and hands which held it, at the very instant of the gong's second, deep, reverberant note.

Pelletier surveyed the damage he had wrought; turned with the rest of us toward the entering procession that came marching in from that arched opening, precisely as we had seen them enter at yesterday's fall of dusk. It was now, however, the fresh, clear light of early morning, and in this better illumination I confess that I gasped at what I had not observed the day before.

Upon the garments, yes, upon the very jutting, powerful features of the members of that hierarchical company gravely advancing now toward us, upon their hair and their beards, even their shaggy eyebrows, hung the clotted dust of the centuries!

But, Wilkes and I did not hesitate over this strange sight. We knew why He had summoned once again these Myrmidons of His

from their sleep-like-death in those storerooms of His, those slave pens.

"Out, for God's sake, out, as quick as you can get them going!" I cried out to Pelletier. "There are thousands of them!" And he, not hesitating now that he had accomplished what he had come here to do, over any idea of conflict against the overwhelming odds which I had indicated, passed swiftly to his Indians the word of command and retreat.

But even this immediate response of his to my warning was not swift enough. We had been observed, and already as he shouted to the chieftain, that corporate roar of rage and fury was rising, multiplying itself, as more and more voices joined in upon its fearsome volume. Already the foremost hierophants of this now-desecrated shrine were parting their ranks to let through and at us the massed warriors who pressed eagerly to the attack.

I was deadly weary. Yet, something of that old fighting blood call of the Canevins, some atavistic battle lust derived from those ancient fighting forebears of mine, nerved me of a sudden. Those ancestors of mine had shirked no conflict, if tradition spoke truly down the ages. I swung up the great bronze sword, a strange, vague, yet unmistakable call from dim departed ages of red battle stirring my blood to fire. With a shout on my lips I stepped out before that company of ours, prepared to meet the oncoming rush, if need be, alone.

But I was frustrated in this mad instinctive gesture—frustrated, I say, and in the strangest manner imaginable. For I was not the only one who stepped out into the open space between our group and the rush of oncoming fighting men of a revived antiquity. No. Beside me, towering tall, slender, commanding, pressed the noble figure of that young chieftain, unarmed, his long arms held straight up before him, the palms of his hands held forward in an immemorial gesture of authority.

Then from his lips there burst a veritable torrent of some strange, sonorous speech, at the sound of which the oncoming fighting men stopped dead.

I paused, amazed at this wholly unexpected occurrence. I

lowered my sword automatically as I saw the menacing weapons brandished by the others likewise lowered.

On and on went that authoritative speech, until of a sudden it stopped as abruptly as it had been begun, and the young chieftain lowered his hands, folded his arms, and stood facing the now silent throng of brown, bearded warriors and the priests of their strange cult behind them, all of them equally motionless before him, their massed attention directed to him alone, standing there like a group carved out of stone.

And then, out of the midst of them, came one great bearded giant. This man, evidently their leader, walked straight toward us where we stood grouped behind the orator, paused before him, and then this statuesque warrior flung down his bronze sword, clanging, and prostrated himself. The young chieftain took two grave steps forward, and placed his sandaled foot upon the prostrate figure's neck. Inspired, I stepped over to him and placed my own great bronze sword in his hand.

14

OF HOW WE TRAVELED back to the Great Circle through a mahogany forest interspersed with ceiba, Otaheite, and Guinea-tamarind trees, I shall say but little. We traversed levels and dips and toiled up slopes and skirted marshlands. We traveled faint trails which had to be negotiated single file. We passed through clearings recently cut free of the clinging bush and trailing liana vines. Occasionally small, tapirlike quadrupeds started up almost under our feet, disturbed at their early-morning browsing in that thick jungle. We stepped along now and again through stretches fragrant with the odors of frangipani blooms, and the rich, attarlike sweetness of the flowering vanilla orchid.

And at last we came to the edge of the Great Circle once more, at a quarter before nine o'clock by my faithful wrist-watch which had not missed a tick throughout all these alarums and excursions. Here Pelletier paused, and in a brief, emphatic speech, in Spanish, took leave of and dismissed his army, which melted away, after profound salaams in our direction, into the

deeper forests forming the hinterlands of that horizon of jungle. Forty or more hostages, brought with us from the company of those Ancient Ones who had accepted the overlordship of that remarkable young chief, departed with them. They were seen no more by us.

I was far too weary--and poor Wilkes was literally tottering in his tracks--to listen very closely to what Pelletier said to the Indians. As soon as the last of them had disappeared out of our sight, the three of us started across the stretch of short grass, up the slight slope toward the center where our plane still rested on the ground. Pelletier forged ahead to get his first-aid satchel for our wounds.

The great tree was gone!

It was nearly ten o'clock when at last we sank down in the grateful shade of the plane's broad wings, and the last thing that I remember before falling into the sleep from which I was awakened an hour and a half later, was Pelletier holding to my mouth one of our canteens, and feeling the comfort to my parched throat of the stale, tepid water it contained.

It was the roar of the rescuing plane which awakened me, at eleven thirty.

We reached Belize a few minutes before two. I had slept part of the way in the air, which is no mean feat considering the thunderous roar of the engine. I stumbled up to my bedroom in the hotel, and did not move until seven the following morning.

When I did awaken, raw with weariness, Peletier was standing beside my bed.

"I thought I'd better tell you as soon as possible," said he genially, "that I did all the necessary talking to that rescue party. You and Wilkes had been scouting around, making discoveries, and had got yourselves pretty well worn in the process. They swallowed that easily enough. It was ordinary engine trouble that dished us, out there where they found us. We were out of gas, too. There was the empty tank to prove it. I'll tell you later where that gasoline went to. I'm responsible for that. You'd better stick to the same simple yarn, too. I've already told Wilkes."

I nodded, and fell asleep again, after drinking without question the glassful of stuff Pelletier handed me. I do not even remember the taste, and I have no idea what the concoction was. But just before noon, when I awakened again, I was myself once more. I got up, bathed thoroughly, and gave myself a very much-needed shave. After lunch I called on the Bishop of British Honduras, and returned to him the binoculars he had considerately loaned me with the thanks of the party.

15

ON THE FOLLOWING MORNING Pelletier and I made our farewells to the splendid Wilkes, and to our other Belize friends and acquaintances. We had secured passage in a fruiter clearing that noon for Kingston, the first leg of our journey home to St. Thomas.

About four P.M. that afternoon Pelletier, whom I had not seen since luncheon on board, lumbered along the deck and stopped at my chair.

"Would you like to hear my end of it all now—or would it do better later?" he inquired. He grinned down at me.

"Later—in St. Thomas preferably, if it's all the same to you, Pelletier," I answered him. "I'd rather get my mind clean off it all and keep it off for the present. Later, by all means, with the home things, the home atmosphere all about me, if you don't mind. Just now I'd rather do nothing and think nothing, and hear nothing beyond ice water, and eating fruit, and sleeping!"

"I don't blame you," threw back Pelletier as he shuffled ponderously away, the smoke from his big black cigar trailing behind him. We were making ten knots or so, with the wind abaft us, a following wind. I had spoken truly to Pelletier. I did not feel just then, nor indeed, for some time later, that I could easily bear more than casual reference to that experience, all of which, it will be remembered, had been crowded into less than two twenty-four-hour days.

I drank ice water. I ate fruit. I slept. And by easy stages, as we had gone to the coast of Central America, we came back again to

the settled peace and comfort of the Lesser Antilles; to the kindly sophistication which is the lovely little city of St. Thomas; to the quiet efficiency of my good servants in my house on Denmark Hill. Only then, it seemed to me, could I quite bear to open my mind again to those affairs in the deep jungle of Quintana Roo, where He had established his "foci" as from time immemorial; where that had happened, with me as active participant, which the structure of our modern minds bears ill in reminiscence . . . .

For it is not always good for a man to see the things that had fallen to Wilkes and myself to see; to have to do what we had done. There were times, even after I had got back and was settled into my accustomed routines, in St. Thomas, when I would lie awake in bed, with the scent of the tuberoses and of Cape Jessamine pouring in through my windows, and fail of ready sleep, and wonder what really had happened out there; whether or not certain aspects of that adventure were not basically incredible; whether, perhaps, my imagination had not tricked me—in other words, whether or not the whole madhouse affair had actually occurred in very truth; and if I, Gerald Canevin, occasional weaver of tales based upon the somewhat strange affairs of these islands of the Lesser Antilles, might not have suffered some eldritch change.

At such times, I found, it was salutary to change over my attention, when this proved possible, to something else, something as radically different as possible.

I played a good deal of contract bridge, I remember, during that interval of doubt and some distress mentally. I accepted more invitations than was usual with me. I wanted, in general, to be with people, sane, everyday ordinary people, my neighbors and friends, as much as possible. I took off some weight, I remember.

16

IT WAS NOT, I THINK, until Pelletier had related to me his account of how he had spent the period beginning with my

disappearance up the tree—it had been removed, I remembered, on my arrival back at the Great Circle, and I had not asked Pelletier what had become of it—until he had marched across that "quadrangle" at the head of his army, that the whole affair, somehow, resolved itself, and ceased troubling me.

"I'll try to tell you my end of it," said Pelletier. He was in a characteristic attitude, sprawled out over the full length of my Chinese rattan lounge-chair on my cool west gallery, a silver swizzel-jug, freshly concocted by my house man, Stephen Penn, placed between us beside two tall greenish glasses, the ice-beads all over the outside of it; cigarettes going; myself, just after having done the honors, in another chair; both of us in fresh, white drill, cool and comfortable.

"I had very little to go on," continued Pelletier, after a healthy sip out of his long, green glass and an accompanying slight grunt of creature satisfaction, "as you may imagine, Canevin, very little indeed. And yet, it all straightened out, cleared itself up in a kind of natural way. It was, I suppose, partly instinct, a kind of sixth sense if you like. For I had no more idea than you or Wilkes that we were running into a—well, a survival, when I looked down out of the plane and first saw that Circle sticking up to the eye out of that jungle like, like a sore thumb!"

"The first definite indication, the first clue, was of course that original crack of wind 'out of the corner of hell,' as Wilkes put it. Wind is air, and my mind, naturally enough, stuck to that. It was not especially brilliant to deduce an air-elemental, or, at least to have that in my mind all the way through the various happenings; before you started up the tree I mean: that wind out of nowhere; the disappearance of Wilkes; the absence of animal and insect life; those Indians getting around us. It all fitted together, somehow, under the circumstances, and after what both of us have seen of the present-day survival of magic—two thirds of the world's population believing in it, practising it: Lord, look at Haiti—well, I thought, if it *were* something supernatural, something not quite of this world, why, then, Canevin, the logic of it all pointed toward the one possibly surviving elemental rather than in some other direction.

"For—don't you see?—man has ousted those others, by his own control of the three other elements, earth, fire, water! The whole land-surface of this planet, practically, has been subjected to human use— agriculture, mines, cities built on it—and water the same. We have dominated the element of water, reduced to its allotted sphere in this man-ruled world-ships, submarines, steam—Lord, there's no end to our use of water! Fire, too, Canevin. We have it—er—harnessed, working for us, in every ship's engine room. every dynamo and factory, in every blast-furnace, cook-stove, campfire, automobile.

"And in all this civilization-long process, the one single element that has remained unsubdued, untamed, is air. We are a long way from what people smugly call "the conquest of air,' Canevin, a mighty long way, even though we have started in on that, too. Even fire is controllable. Fires do not start by themselves. There is no such thing as 'spontaneous combustion'! But who, Canevin, can control the winds of heaven?

"Maybe there's more in what I've just said than appears on the surface. Take astrology for example. Modern science laughs at astrology, puts it in the same category as those Bodily Humours, the Melancholic, and the rest of them! Astronomers nowadays, scientists busy measuring light-years, the chemistry of Antares, whether or not there is barium on Mars, the probable weight of Eros, or the 'new' one, Pluto—those fellows tell us the old beliefs about the stars are so much junk. Why? Well, because, they say, the old ideas of things like zodiacal groups and so forth are 'unscientific,' formulated on the basis of how the stars look from Earth's surface, merely! Artificial, unscientific! The stars must be looked at mathematically, they tell us, not as they appear from your gallery at night.

"But, Canevin, which of these modern sharps has told us where one *should* stand, to view the heavens? And —speaking pragmatically; that's a good scientific word!—which of them has done more than figure out weights, distances—what of them, dry approximations of alleged facts, Canevin?—a lot of formulas like the inside of an algebra book. Which of them, the modern scientific astronomers, from my good old Professor Pickering at

Harvard down—for he was the king-pin of them all—has given humanity one single, practical, useful fact, out of all their up-to-the minute modern science? Answer: not one, Canevin!

"And here's the red meat in that coconut—think of this, Canevin, in the light of relativity, or the Quantum Theory if you like; that's 'modern' and 'scientific' enough, God knows: the astrological approach is the normal approach, Canevin, *for people living on this planet.* We have to view the heavens from here, because that's where Almighty God Who made us and them put us. That's the only viewpoint we have, Canevin, and—it works; it possesses the—er— pragmatic sanction of common sense!

"Well, now, to get down to the brass tacks of this thing, the thing we've been through together, I mean: what is it, as we human beings, constrained to live on Earth and meet Earth conditions know it, that upsets our schemes, plans and calculations as we deal with the three elements that we have brought under control, subdued? It's air, Canevin.

"It's air and air alone that sends hurricanes into these latitudes and knocks out the work and hopes of decades of effort; takes crops, animals, buildings. It's air that just this season smashed things to pieces right nearby here, in Nicaragua; knocked old Santo Domingo City into a cocked hat. Plants can't grow, leaf-plants especially, without air. Without air fire itself refuses to burn. That's the principle of all the workable fire extinguishers. Without air man and the animals can't breathe, and die like fish out of water, painfully. Without air—but what's the use of carrying it further, Canevin?

"I had, of course, that first day and night, alone, to think in. All that, and a lot more besides, went into those cogitations of mine under that tree in the Great Circle both before and after I was there all by myself; mostly after, when I had nothing else to do but think. You see? It wasn't so very hard to figure out, after all.

"But figuring it out was less than half the battle. I was appalled, Canevin, there with my merely human brain figuring out the possible combinations, at what He could do, if He happened to take it into His head. His head! Why, He could

merely draw away the breathable air from around us three intruders, and we'd flop over and pass out then and there. He could blast us into matchwood with a hurricane at any moment. He could—well, there's no use going over all the things I figured that He could do. The ways of the gods and demigods have never been the ways of men, Canevin. All literature affirms that. Well, He didn't do any of those things. He was going at it His way. How to circumvent Him, in time! *That* was the real problem.

"I had, theoretically at least, all three of the other elements to use against Him, the same as every man has—such as a dugout of earth, out there in Kansas, against a tornado of wind; a log fire, to get over the effects of a New England blizzard. I put my mind on it, Canevin, and decided to use Fire— *to burn down the tree!* I did it, toward dusk of the second day.

"I soaked it, all over the trunk and lower part, and as far up as I could reach and throw, with the gasoline from the plane's tanks. I used it all. I was counting, you see, on the rescue plane following our route the next morning when we hadn't shown up in Belize; but, if I couldn't get you and Wilkes back I was pretty thoroughly dished anyhow, and so, of course, were you two fellows.

"I lighted it and ran, Canevin, ran out of the shade—there wouldn't be any left in a short time anyhow—and over to the plane and sat down under the farther wing where I could get a good look through the binoculars at those savages down yonder. I wanted to see how the idea of my fighting one element with another would strike them.

"It struck them right enough!

"There had been plenty of gasoline. The fire roared up the dry tree. It was blazing in every twig, it seemed, inside two minutes after I had set it going. Talk of a study in primitive fear! Psychology! I had it right there, all around me. The only kick I had coming was that I couldn't watch it all at once. It was like trying to take in a forty-ring circus with one pair of eyes!

"They liked it, Canevin! That much was clear enough anyhow.

"It was a medium-sized limb, burned halfway through, which broke off and fell between me and the main blaze, that suddenly

gave me the big idea. So far I hadn't planned beyond destroying the tree, His bridge between Earth and wherever He was. But then it suddenly flashed through my mind that here was a chance to enlist those aborigines, while they were all together, and in the mood, so to speak. I went over and picked up that blazing limb. It made a magnificent torch, and, holding it up above my head where it blazed as I walked in the falling dusk, I proceeded, slow and dignified, down toward the place at the jungle's rim where they seemed to be most thickly congregated.

"I had the wit to sing, Canevin! Never knew I could sing, did you? I did then, all the way, the best stab I could make at a kind of paean of victory. Do you get the idea? I walked along steadily, roaring out at the top of my voice. There weren't any particular words—only a lot of volume to it!

"It occurred to me halfway down that out of those thousands some certainly would know some Spanish. The idea took hold of me, and by the time I had got near enough to make them understand I had some sentences framed up that would turn them inside-out if it got across to their primitive minds! I stopped, and raised the torch up high over my head, and called it out like old Cortez ordering a charge!

"For a few instants right afterwards I waited to see the effect. If any. They seemed to be milling around more or less in groups and bunches. That, I figured, would be the fellows who understood Spanish telling the others! Then—then it worked, Canevin! They prostrated themselves, in rows, in battalions, in tribes! And every one of them, I was careful to notice, still kept within the safe shelter of the woods. I had, you see, told them who I was, Canevin! I was the Lord of the Fire, that was all, the Great Friend of mankind, the Lord, the Destroyer, the Big Buckaroo and High Cockalorum of all the Elements, and pretty much everything else besides. Spanish lends itself, somehow, to those broad, general statements!

"And then, once again, I had an inspiration. I gathered myself together after that first blast that I had turned loose on them, and let go another! This time I informed them that I was destroying my enemy the Ruler of the Air, who was their enemy

as well--I gathered that, of course, from their fear of the Circle–Who had been having His own way with them for a couple of thousand years or thereabouts; that they could see for themselves that I was right here on the tabu-place the Circle, and unharmed; and then I called for volunteers to come out of the woods and *stand beside me in the Circle!*

17

"Canevin, there was a silence that you could have cut with a knife. It lasted and lasted, and lasted! I began to get afraid that perhaps I had gone too far, in some unrealizable way–with savages, you know: not a single, solitary sound, not a whisper, from that mob weighed down with sixty generations of fear.

Then–to a rising murmur which grew into a solid roar of astonishment–one of them. an upstanding young man with an intelligent face, stepped out toward me. I suppose that fellow and his descendants will have epic songs sung about them for the next sixty generations, nights of the full moon.

"I had had the general idea, you see, of getting this mob convinced: the new harmlessness of the ancient tabu-ground for conclusive evidence; and then enlisting them. Precisely what I was going to do with them, what to set them at doing, wasn't so clear as the general idea of getting them back to me.

"And right then, when it was working, everything coming my way, I very nearly dropped my authoritative torch, my symbol of the firepower! I went cold, Canevin, from head to foot; positively sick, with plain, shaking, shivering fear! Did they all suddenly start after me with their throw-sticks and blow-guns? Did an unexpected hurricane tear down on me? No. Nothing like that. I had merely thought, quite suddenly, out of nowhere, of something! The air was as calm around me as ever. Not an Indian made a hostile gesture. It was an idea that had occurred to me–fool, idiot, moron!

"It had just struck me, amidships, that in destroying the tree, His bridge to Earth, I might have cut you and Wilkes off forever from getting back! That was what made the quick, cold sweat

run down into my eyes; that was what sent waves of nausea over me.

I stood there and sweated and trembled from head to foot. It was only by sheer will power that I kept the torch up in the air, a proper front before those still thousands. My mind reeled with the trouble of it. And then, after a sudden silence, they started yelling themselves blue once more, with enthusiasm over that champion of champions who had dared to step out on the forbidden ground; to enter the Circle for the first time in history—their history.

"That paladin was close to me now, coming on steadily, confidently, quite nearby. My eyes went around to him. He was a fine, clean-cut-looking person. He stopped, and raised his hands over his head, and made me a kind of salaam.

"The whole yowling mob quieted down again at that—wanted to see what I'd do to him, I suppose.

"I stepped over to him and handed him the torch. He took it, and looked me in the eye. He was some fellow. that young Indian!

"I spoke to him, in Spanish:

" 'Exalted Servant of the Fire, indicate to me now the direction of the other forbidden place, where He of the Wind places his foot upon Earth.' Every chance the three of us had in the world was staked on that question, Canevin; on the idea that lay behind it; on the possibility that there was more than one bridge-place like this Great Circle where we stood. It was, of course, merely a piece of guesswork.

"And, Canevin, he raised his other arm, the one that was not holding the torch, and pointed and answered:

'Straight to the south, Lord of Fire!'

"Canevin, I could have kissed that Indian! Another chance! I went up to him and hugged him like a bear. I don't know what he thought of that. I didn't give him time to think, to make up his mind. I held him off at arms' length as though he had been my favorite brother-in-law that I hadn't seen for a couple of years! I said to him: 'Speak, heroic Servant of the Fire—name your reward!'

"He never hesitated an instant. He knew what he wanted, that fellow—saw this was his big chance. He breathed hard. I could see his big chest go in and out. He'll go a long way, believe me, Canevin!

" 'The lordship over—these!' he said, with a little gasp, and pointed with the torch, around the circle. I raised both my hands over my head and called out:

" 'Hearken, men of this nation! Behold your overlord who with his descendants shall rule over all your nations and tribes and peoples to the end of time. Down—and salute your lord!' A little later, when they got it, as they dropped in rows on their faces, Canevin, I turned to that fellow holding the torch, and said:

" 'Call them together; make them sit in a circle around us here. Then the first thing you are to do is to pick out the men you want to help you govern them. After that, tell them they are to listen to me!'

"He looked me in the eye again, and nodded. Oh, he was an intelligent one, that fellow! To make a long story short, he did just that; and you can picture us there in the moonlight, for the moon had a chance to get going long before the Indians were arranged the way I had said, the new king bossing them all as though he had never done anything else, with me standing there in the center and haranguing them—I'd had plenty of time, you see, to get that speech together—and, as I palavered, the interpreters relayed it to the rest.

"The upshot of it all was that we started off for the place, the other place where He could 'put his foot upon Earth' as I had said, the place where we found you. It took us all night, even with that willing mob swinging their machetes."

18

I THANKED PELLETIER FOR HIS STORY. He had already heard the outline of mine, such as I have recounted here somewhat more fully. I let his account sink in, and then, as I have said, I was able to be myself again. Perhaps Pelletier's very

commonplace sanity, the matter-of-factness of his account, may have had something to do with this desirable effect. I do not know, but I am glad to be able to record the fact.

"There is one thing not quite clear in my mind," said I, after Pelletier had finished.

"Yes?" said Pelletier, encouragingly.

"That figure in the temple—Aquarius," I explained. "Just how did you happen to fasten on that? I understand, of course, why you destroyed it. It was, like the tree, one of His 'foci,' a 'bridge' to Earth. By wiping those out, as I understand the matter, you broke what I might call his Earth-power; you cut off his points of access. It's mysterious enough, yet clear in a way. But how did you know that *that* was the focal point, so to speak? Why the statue? Why not, for example, the altar?"

Pelletier nodded, considering my questions. Then he smiled whimsically.

"That's because you do not know your astrology, Canevin!" he said, propping his bulk up on one arm, for emphasis, and looking straight at me. He grinned broadly, like a mischievous boy. Then:

"You remember—I touched on that—how important it is, or should be, as an element in a modern education! Aquarius would fool you; would puzzle anybody, I'll grant you—anybody, that is, who doesn't know his astrology! You'd think from his name that he was allied with the element of water, wouldn't you, Canevin? The name practically says so: 'Aquarius' — water-bearer. You'd think so, unless, as I say, you knew your astrology!"

"What do you mean?" I asked. "It's too much for me, Pelletier. You'll have to tell me, I'm afraid." It was plain that Pelletier held some joker up his sleeve.

"Did you ever see a picture of Aquarius, Canevin, in which—stop and think a moment— he is not represented as *pouring water out* of that vessel of his? Aquarius is not the personage who *represents* water, Canevin. Quite the contrary, in fact. He's the fellow who is getting rid of the water to make way for the air. Aquarius, in spite of his name, is the zodiacal symbol for *air,* not water, as you'd imagine if you didn't know your

astrology, Canevin! He is represented always as *pouring out water,* getting rid of it! Aquarius is *not* the protagonist of water. He is the precursor, the forerunner of air!" As he said this, Dr. Pelletier waved one of his big, awkward-looking hands—sure sign of something on his mind. I laughed. I admitted freely that my education had been neglected.

"And what next?" I asked, smiling at my big friend. He laughed that big contagious laugh of his.

"Canevin," said he, wagging his head at me, "I'm wondering which of the big archeologists, or maybe somerank outsider, who will go to the top on it, and get D.Sc.'s all the way from Harvard to the University of Upsala—which of 'em will be the first to 'discover' that the first Maya civilization is *not* defunct; knock the very best modern archeological science endwise all over again, the way it's constantly being done in every 'scientific' field, from Darwin to Kirsopp Lake! An 'epoch-making discovery!' "

Then, musing, seriously, yet with a twinkle in his kindly brown eyes:

"I have great hopes of the leadership they're going to get; that they're getting, right now, Canevin. That was some up-and-coming boy, some fellow, that new king in Quintana Roo, the one I appointed, the new ruler of the jungle! Did you see him, Canevin, standing there, telling them what was what?

"Do you know, I never even found out his name! He's one of the very few, by the way—told me about it on the trek back to the Circle—who had learned the old language. It's come down, you know, through the priests, here and there, intact, just as they used to speak it a couple of thousand years ago. Well, you heard him use it! Quite a group, I believe, keep it up, in and around Chichen-Itza particularly. He told them, he said, how fire had prevailed over their traditional air—Aquarius lying there, toppled off his pedestal, to prove it!"

I was glad I had given the young chieftain my bronze sword. Perhaps its possession will help him in establishing his authority over those Old Ones. That giant from whose hand I originally snatched it there in the temple may very well have been their head man. He was big enough, and fast enough on his feet; had

the primitive leadership qualities, in all conscience. He had been mightily impressive as he came bounding ahead of his followers, charging upon us through the clouds of dust.

* * * * *

I have kept the sliver Wilkes, poor fellow, cut from the palm of the great Hand. I discovered it, rolled up and quite hardened and stiff, in the pocket of my trousers there in the hotel in Belize when I was changing to fresh clothes.

I keep it in a drawer of my bureau, in my bedroom. Nobody sees it there; nobody asks what it is.

"Yes—a sliver cut from the superficial scarf-skin of one of the ancient classical demigods! Yes—interesting, isn't it!"

I'd rather not have to describe that sliver. Probably my hearers would say nothing much. People are courteous, especially here in St. Thomas where there is a tradition to that effect. But they could hardly visualize, as I still do—yet, fortunately, at decreasing intervals—that cosmic Entity of the high atmosphere, presiding over His element of air; menacing, colossal; His vast heart beating on eternally as, stupendous, incredible, He towers there inscrutable among the unchanging stars.

The text of this edition of *The Great Circle* is the original publication, as it appeared in STRANGE TALES, with a few minor corrections.

THE DOOM THAT CAME TO SARNATH

by H. P. Lovecraft

This story was written in 1919, according to the author's own catalogue and chronology of his tales as set forth in a private letter in 1939. It falls in to what might be called Lovecraft's "Dunsany" period, as he did a number of brief fantasies around this time which are very similar in tone to the short stories of Lord Dunsany, whom HPL respected highly.

THERE IS IN THE LAND OF MNAR a vast still lake that is fed by no stream, and out of which no stream flows. Ten thousand years ago there stood by its shore the mighty city of Sarnath, but Sarnath stands there no more.

It is told that in the immemorial years when the world was young, before ever the men of Sarnath came to the land of Mnar, another city stood beside the lake; the gray stone city of Ib,

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which was old as the lake itself, and peopled with beings not pleasing to behold. Very odd and ugly were these beings, as indeed are most beings of a world yet inchoate and rudely fashioned. It is written on the brick cylinders of Kadatheron that the beings of Ib were in hue as green as the lake and the mists that rise above it; that they had bulging eyes, pouting, flabby lips, and curious ears, and were without voice. It is also written that they descended one night from the moon in a mist; they and the vast still lake and gray stone city Ib. However this may be, it is certain that they worshipped a sea-green stone idol chiseled in the likeness of Bokrug, the great water-lizard; before which they danced horribly when the moon was gibbous. And it is written in the papyrus of Ilarnek, that they one day discovered fire, and thereafter kindled flames on many ceremonial occasions. But not much is written of these beings, because they lived in very ancient times, and man is young, and knows but little of the very ancient living things.

After many eons men came to the land of Mnar, dark shepherd folk with their fleecy flocks, who built Thraa, Ilarnek, and Kadatheron on the winding river Ai. And certain tribes, more hardy than the rest, pushed on to the border of the lake and built Sarnath at a spot where precious metals were found in the earth.

Not far from the gray city of Ib did the wandering tribes lay the first stones of Sarnath, and at the beings of Ib they marveled greatly. But with their marveling was mixed hate, for they thought it not meet that beings of such aspect should walk about the world of men at dusk. Nor did they like the strange sculptures upon the gray monoliths of Ib, for how those sculptures lingered so late in the world, even until the coming men, none can tell; unless it was because the land of Mnar is very still, and remote from most other lands, both of waking and of dream.

As the men of Sarnath beheld more of the beings of Ib their hate grew, and it was not less because they found the beings weak, and soft as jelly to the touch of stones and arrows. So one day the young warriors, the slingers and the spearmen and the bowmen, marched against Ib and slew all the inhabitants thereof,

pushing the queer bodies into the lake with long spears, because they did not wish to touch them. And because they did not like the gray sculptured monoliths of Ib they cast these also into the lake; wondering from the greatness of the labor how ever the stones were brought from afar, as they must have been, since there is naught like them in the land of Mnar or in the lands adjacent.

Thus of the very ancient city of Ib was nothing spared, save the sea-green stone idol chiseled in the likeness of Bokrug, the water-lizard. This the young warriors took back with them as a symbol of conquest over the old gods and beings of Ib, and as a sign of leadership in Mnar. But on the night after it was set up in the temple, a terrible thing must have happened, for weird lights were seen over the lake, and in the morning the people found the idol gone and the high-priest Taran-Ish lying dead, as from some fear unspeakable. And before he died, Taran-Ish had scrawled upon the altar of chrysolite with coarse shaky strokes the sign of DOOM.

After Taran-Ish there were many high-priests in Sarnath, but never was the sea-green stone idol found. And many centuries came and went, wherein Sarnath prospered exceedingly, so that only priests and old women remembered what Taran-Ish had scrawled upon the altar of chrysolite. Betwixt Sarnath and the city of Ilarnek arose a caravan route, and the precious metals from the earth were exchanged for other metals and rare cloths and jewels and books and tools for artificers and all things of luxury that are known to the people who dwell along the winding river Ai and beyond. So Sarnath waxed mighty and learned and beautiful, and sent forth conquering armies to subdue the neighboring cities; and in time there sate upon a throne in Sarnath the kings of all the land of Mnar and of many lands adjacent.

The wonder of the world and the pride of all mankind was Sarnath the magnificent. Of polished desert-quarried marble were its walls, in height three hundred cubits and in breadth seventy-five, so that chariots might pass each other as men drove them along the top. For full five hundred stadia did they run,

being open only on the side toward the lake where a green stone sea-wall kept back the waves that rose oddly once a year at the festival of the destroying of Ib. In Sarnath were fifty streets from the lake to the gates of the caravans, and fifty more intersecting them. With onyx were they paved, save those whereon the horses and camels and elephants trod, which were paved with granite. And the gates of Sarnath were as many as the landward ends of the streets, each of bronze, and flanked by the figures of lions and elephants carven from some stone no longer known among men. The houses of Sarnath were of glazed brick and chalcedony, each having its walled garden and crystal lakelet. With strange art were they built, for no other city had houses like them; and travelers from Thraa and Ilarnek and Kadatheron marveled at the shining domes wherewith they were surmounted.

But more marvelous still were the palaces and the temples and the gardens made by Zokkar the olden king. There were many palaces, the last of which were mightier than any in Thraa or Ilarnek or Kadatheron. So high were they that one within might sometimes fancy himself beneath only the sky; yet when lighted with torches dipt in the oil of Dother their walls showed vast paintings of kings and armies, of a splendor at once inspiring and stupefying to the beholder. Many were the pillars of the palaces, all of tinted marble, and carven into designs of surpassing beauty. And in most of the palaces the floors were mosaics of beryl and lapis lazuli and sardonyx and carbuncle and other choice materials, so disposed that the beholder might fancy himself walking over beds of the rarest flowers. And there were likewise fountains, which cast scented waters about in pleasing jets arranged with cunning art. Outshining all others was the palace of the kings of Mnar and of the lands adjacent. On a pair of golden crouching lions rested the throne, many steps above the gleaming floor. And it was wrought of one piece of ivory, though no man lives who knows whence so vast a piece could have come. In that palace there were also many galleries, and many amphitheaters where lions and men and elephants battled at the pleasure of the kings. Sometimes the amphitheaters were flooded with water conveyed from the lake in might aqueducts, and then were

enacted stirring sea-fights, or combats betwixt swimmers and deadly marine things.

Lofty and amazing were the seventeen tower-like temples of Sarnath, fashioned of a bright multi-colored stone not known elsewhere. A full thousand cubits high stood the greatest among them, wherein the high-priests dwelt with a magnificence scarce less than that of the kings. On the ground were halls as vast and splendid as those of the palaces; where gathered throngs in worship of Zo-Kalar and Tamash and Lobon, the chief gods of Sarnath, whose incense-enveloped shrines were as the thrones of monarchs. Not like the eikons of other gods were those of Zo-Kalar and Tamash and Lobon. For so close to life were they that one might swear the graceful bearded gods themselves sate on the ivory thrones. And up unending steps of zircon was the tower-chamber, wherefrom the high-priests looked out over the city and the plains and the lake by day; and at the cryptic moon and significant stars and planets, and their reflections in the lake, at night. Here was done the very secret and ancient rite in detestation of Bokrug, the water-lizard, and here rested the altar of chrysolite which bore the Doom-scrawl of Taran-Ish.

Wonderful likewise were the gardens made by Zokkar the olden king. In the center of Sarnath they lay, covering a great space and encircled by a high wall. And they were surmounted by a mighty dome of glass, through which shone the sun and moon and planets when it was clear, and from which were hung fulgent images of the sun and moon and stars and planets when it was not clear. In summer the gardens were cooled with fresh odorous breezes skilfully wafted by fans, and in winter they were heated with concealed fires, so that in those gardens it was always spring. There ran little streams over bright pebbles, dividing meads of green and gardens of many hues, and spanned by a multitude of bridges. Many were the waterfalls in their courses, and many were the lilied lakelets into which they expanded. Over the streams and lakelets rode white swans, whilst the music of rare birds chimed in with the melody of the waters. In ordered terraces rose the green banks, adorned here and there with bowers of vines and sweet blossoms, and seats and benches

of marble and porphyry. And there were many small shrines and temples where one might rest or pray to small gods.

Each year there was celebrated in Sarnath the feast of the destroying of Ib, at which time wine, song, dancing and merriment of every kind abounded. Great honors were then paid to the shades of those who had annihilated the odd ancient beings, and the memory of those beings and of their elder gods was derided by dancers and lutanists crowned with roses from the gardens of Zokkar. And the kings would look out over the lake and curse the bones of the dead that lay beneath it.

At first the high-priests liked not these festivals, for there had descended amongst them queer tales of how the sea-green eikon had vanished, and how Taran-Ish had died from fear and left a warning. And they said that from their high tower they sometimes saw lights beneath the waters of the lake. But as many years passed without calamity even the priests laughed and cursed and joined in the orgies of the feasters. Indeed, had they not themselves, in their high tower, often performed the very ancient and secret rite in detestation of Bokrug, the water-lizard? And a thousand years of riches and delight passed over Sarnath, wonder of the world.

Gorgeous beyond thought was the feast of the thousandth year of the destroying of Ib. For a decade had it been talked of in the land of Mnar, and as it drew nigh there came to Sarnath on horses and camels and elephants men from Thraa, Ilarnek, and Kadatheron, and all the cities of Mnar, and the lands beyond. Before the marble walls on the appointed night were pitched the pavilions of princes and the tents of travelers. Within his banquet-hall reclined Nargis-Hei, the king, drunken with ancient wine from the vaults of conquered Pnoth, and surrounded by feasting nobles and hurrying slaves. There were eaten many strange delicacies at that feast; peacocks from the distant hills of Implan, heels of camels from the Bnazic desert, nuts and spices from Sydathrian groves, and pearls from wave-washed Mtal dissolved in the vinegar of Thraa. Of sauces there were an untold number, prepared by the subtlest cooks in all Mnar, and suited to the palate of every feaster. But most prized of all the viands were

the great fishes from the lake, each of vast size, and served upon golden platters set with rubies and diamonds.

Whilst the king and his nobles feasted within the palace, and viewed the crowning dish as it awaited them on golden platters, others feasted elsewhere. In the tower of the great temple the priests held revels, and in pavilions without the walls the princes of neighboring lands made merry. And it was the high-priest Gnai-Kah who first saw the shadows that descended from the gibbous moon into the lake, and the damnable green mists that arose from the lake to meet the moon and to shroud in a sinister haze the towers and the domes of fated Sarnath. Thereafter those in the towers and without the walls beheld strange lights on the water, and saw that the gray rock Akurion, which was wont to rear high above it near the shore, was almost submerged. And fear grew vaguely yet swiftly, so that the princes of Ilarnck and of far Rokol took down and folded their tents and pavilions and departed, though they scarce knew the reason for their departing.

Then, close to the hour of midnight, all the bronze gates of Sarnath burst upon and emptied forth a frenzied throng that blackened the plain, so that all the visiting princes and travelers fled away in fright. For on the faces of this throng was writ a madness born of horror unendurable, and on their tongues were words so terrible that no hearer paused for proof. Men whose eyes were wild with fear shrieked aloud of the sight within the king's banquet-hall, where through the windows were seen no longer the forms of Nargis-Hei and his nobles and slaves, but a horde of indescribable green voiceless things with bulging eyes, pouting, flabby lips, and curious ears; things which danced horribly, bearing in their paws golden platters set with rubies and diamonds and containing uncouth flames. And the princes and travelers, as they fled from the doomed city of Sarnath on horses and camels and elephants, looked again upon the mist-begetting lake and saw the gray rock Akurion was quite submerged. Through all the land of Mnar and the land adjacent spread the tales of those who had fled from Sarnath, and caravans sought that accursed city and its precious metals no more. It was long ere any travelers went thither, and even then only the brave and

adventurous young men of yellow hair and blue eyes, who are no kin to the men of Mnar. These men indeed went to the lake to view Sarnath; but though they found the vast still lake itself, and the gray rock Akurion which rears high above it near the shore, they beheld not the wonder of the world and pride of all mankind. Where once had risen walls of three hundred cubits and towers yet higher, now stretched only the marshy shore, and where once had dwelt fifty million of men now crawled the detestable water-lizard. Not even the mines of precious metal remained. DOOM had come to Sarnath.

But half buried in the rushes was spied a curious green idol; an exceedingly ancient idol chiseled in the likeness of Bokrug, the great water-lizard. That idol, enshrined in the high temple at Ilarnek, was subsequently worshipped beneath the gibbous moon throughout the land of Mnar.

Inquisitions

FIGURES OF EARTH and THE SILVER STALLION, by James Branch Cabell; Ballantine Books; introductions by Lin Carter; softcover; 95 cents each.

Some may disagree with the opening statement in Lin Carter's introduction to *Figures of Earth:* "James Branch Cabell is the single greatest fantasy novelist America has ever produced," but I, for one, am entirely in accord with it. And he notes that the term "greatest": "...does not, of necessity, imply 'best' or 'most successful and popular' or 'most literary and artistic' or even 'most permanent.'

If your reading in fantasy thus far has been confined to magazine material (or stories originally published in magazines—which would include all the canonical tales of Edgar Allan Poe, for example), then you will find the fantasies of Cabell quite different. There are heroic elements in them, but in an entirely different manner than these are found in the works of Robert E. Howard or Edgar Rice Burroughs; you will find weird elements in them, but not in the manner of Poe or Lovecraft; you will find fantastic elements in them, but not in the manner of A. Merritt; you will find erotic elements in them, but not in the manner of any magazine author I can think of. The only comparisons—and these are slight—which come to my mind are the whimsy of Thorne Smith for the erotic elements (and I suspect that he was influenced by Cabell), and the Lord Dunsany of *The King of Elfland's Daughter* for minor aspects of the realistic elements (but I doubt that if Dunsany was in any way influenced by Cabell).

For these are realistic fantasies, but

not realistic in the manner that most anyone is likely to think of when you speak of realism. The trappings of fantasy and highly imaginative romance are there, including some very weird ones indeed (sometimes rather chilling, in fact), but the characters in the stories nearly all behave in a most realistic manner—at least the leading ones do. The marvellous situations and events are taken for granted, with no more fuss about them than the subway; and, in fact, the subway is a very good comparison, since the people in these stories are as likely as not to talk about such phenomena and happenings in the same grumbling manner that one talks about the way the subways run, etc.

As James Blish has pointed out, the dialogue in these stories is entirely natural and matter-of-fact; and you get in to the expansive and highflown rhetoric of the conventional fantasy novel in literature only when someone is trying to justify himself or pull a fast one. Then, it gets wonderfully eloquent—which is, of course, an essential part of Cabell's humor.

The man was, first of all, a humorist in the grand manner; he was very erudite indeed, and the only author I can think of offhand who matches and surpasses him is James Joyce. His first published story appeared in *THE SMART SET* (March, 1902); *As Played Before His Highness*, is a whimsical tale in a Graustarkian setting, which would make a delightful one-act play if no one has gotten around to making a stage version of it. The basic element, without the erudition, was there from the start; it expanded and richened as Cabell continued. The "heroes" of the stories are not particularly heroic, being quite content to let others do the great deeds of valor and then pick their pockets, as it were; but these are not anti-heroes or picaresque heroes, and they manage to show a reasonable minimum of courage and perseverance when such becomes absolutely necessary. But you won't find thrilling battles with monsters, evil sorcerers, etc., such as is the substance of the Conan stories. David H. Keller's "Cecil" section of *Tales From Underwood* comes closer to Cabell (particularly *No Other Man*), without the expansive erudition (although Keller is not by any means devoid of it; there are numerous humorous buried allusions in these tales) wherein Cabell mixes up known mythologies to suit himself and tosses in invented mythology of his own so that it is anything but easy to be sure which is which without a great deal of research.

You do not *have* to be learned in such matters in order to enjoy the stories heartily, however; it's just an instance of seeing more and more of the jokes the more you know about the intricate details in his background. But the stories remain delightful, whimsical tales on the surface, with a wealth of satire right before your eyes; while the person interested in scholarship (both real and whimsical in the manner of the Baker Street Irregulars—and for the latter folk there's the James Branch Cabell Society)* can find much to dig into.

The bulk of Cabell's books accumulate to a work which can be called *Biography of the Life of Manuel*, and it may have been another expression of the author's whimsy that it remains difficult to make up a list of the titles. As James N. Hall puts it in *The Biography of Manuel (KALKI*, Vol. II, No. 1): "Even the number of volumes in

*A sample copy of *KALKI*, the official publication of the James Branch Cabell may be obtained by writing to Paul Spencer, 655 Lotis Avenue, Oradell, New Jersey 07649, and asking for it, saying that you saw the notice in this magazine.

the series is arguable. In the Colophon to *The Way of Ecben* (McBride, 1929), Cabell states that 'the units of the long Biography of Dom Manuel's life add up to a neat twenty, which is convenient to the laws of Poictesme.' (Where things go by tens forever, RAWL.) Yet the deluxe and presumably definitive Storisende edition (modeled, it would seem, on the New York edition of Henry James' works) has only eighteen volumes.

"And: facing the title page of *The Devil's Own Dear Son* (Farrar, Straus & Co., 1949) is a list of books by James Branch Cabell which shows twenty-three volumes in the Bibliography . . ." which, Hall says, includes one title that Cabell never got around to writing, one which is positively *not* a part of the Biography, and excludes others which most definitely are part of it.

No matter. Whether you want (now or later) to go as far as the dedicated Cabellians, the odds are very high that you will enjoy these first two books in the series; and while *Figures of Earth* is not the first to have been written and published, it is the most sensible place to start, for this is the story of Manuel himself, and tells it as it really was. Manuel is an ordinary-seeming young swineherd in Poictesme (more or less, on the surface, a counterpart of medieval Provence) with a rather curious obsession. Some have called him stupid, but I'd substitute "ignorant" since he shows himself reasonably capable of learning from experience. He has a sure talent for attracting women and telling people what they want to hear, and this is the secret of his success. By the standards of heroic fiction, he's a coward (What true romantic hero would so unhesitatingly surrender his bride to death?—And Manuel *does* love Niafer in his own fashion, as is proved by what he undergoes to get her back later!), but somehow his cowardice seems to come out as simple common sense. He betrays every friend and lover in the end, and yet it seems so natural and understandable a thing to do under the circumstances—really, why be silly? Somehow, we can't quite despise this squinting Manuel, who sees himself become a legend in his own lifetime. He goes with Grandfather Death, the second time that worthy comes around saying, as before, that either Manuel or the one with him at the moment must come now; yet, for reasons which do him not a whit more credit than his former choice!

It's marvellous satire from start to finish, not only on history and heroic novels, but on the entire human condition, and I do not recall an angry or bitter word in it. So the novel ends with Dom Manuel riding off with Grandfather Death (but the conversation en route and the revelation of where Manuel ends up is something very special) and a young boy who is out too late sees them and comes back to tell a fantastic story. Young Jurgen is spanked both for staying out too late and fibbing.

But Manuel has disappeared, and the folk call young Jurgen in to repeat his story; this becomes the foundation of the legend of Manuel the Redeemer, who will one day return in glory; and it is with the growth of this legend, and the fate of Manuel's companions (the Fellowship of the Silver Stallion) that the second novel, *The Silver Stallion* deals. You can, of course, read this one first; as it happened, I read the three central novels, *Figures of Earth*, *The Silver Stallion*, and, *Jurgen* in reverse order back in 1937 or 38, so can assure you that it does no harm, and each one is well contained in itself. But it's still more fun to read these three in order; while after *Jurgen* (and that's as far as I've gone myself at this writing) it does not make any difference about the order of reading, from what I have heard.

The fate of the companions of the

Silver Stallion (although one or two are reserved for later novels) is entirely fascinating and wonderful, and in some instances, as with the case of Guivric of Perdigon, quite chilling, while in others, as with Coth of the Rocks, as delightful light erotic fantasy as one could wish for. Cabell enlarges upon Poe's practice of invented authorities and non-existent books which settle the matter, but these tomes are not used in the manner of Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*.

Regrettably, the third novel in this trilogy, *Jurgen*, has now gone out of print–I refer to the softcover, Avon edition; in hard cover, the books have been out of print for decades–but perhaps Ballantine will include it in its Cabell series later, if Avon doesn't see the light and re-issue it. In any event, you'll have a wonderful time with *Figures of Earth* and *The Silver Stallion;* however, not wishing to mislead you, I recommend that you get the first only and see if Cabell is to your taste. While the thought that he might not be so bringeth sadness to me, I realize that this might be the case with you: and the truth is that if you do not like the first one, you're not likely to care for the others, for the same reasons. (But if you have enjoyed the light fantasies of Thorne Smith, or the fantasy-burlesques of L. Sprague de Camp, then the odds are very good that Cabell is right for you.) RAWL

NEVER BET THE DEVIL YOUR HEAD

A Moral Tale

by Edgar Allan Poe

"Con tal que las costumbres de un autor," says Don Thomas de las Torres, in the preface to his "Amatory Poems" *"sean puras y castas, importo muy poco que no sean igualmente severas sus obras"*—meaning, in plain English, that provided the morals of an author are pure personally, it signifies nothing what are the morals of his books. We presume that Don Thomas is now in Purgatory for the assertion. It would be a clever thing, too, in the way of poetical justice, to keep him there until his "Amatory Poems" get out of print, or are laid definitely upon the shelf through lack of readers. Every fiction *should have* a moral; and, what is more to the purpose, the critics have discovered that every fiction *has*. Philip Melanchthon, some time ago, wrote a commentary upon the "Batrachomyomachia," and proved that the poet's object was to excite a distaste for sedition. Pierre la Seine, going a step farther, shows that the intention was to

Under the title, *Never Bet Your Head*, this story was first published in *GRAHAM'S MAGAINE*, September 1841.

Some years back, a reader in Canada wrote to *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, requesting, among other titles, that we reprint *The Oblong Box* and *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*, by Edgar Allan Poe – two stories of which he had heard, but never been able to find. Re-reading my comments on his letter, I'm ready to take back most of them, at least in relation to the present story. Re-reading it has convinced me that I was just plain wrong; far from being stuffy and heavy-handed, this is a truly witty and whimsical extravaganza – and while I would still say that it may be too far out for *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, certainly room can be found for it in a fantasy title. A little explication may be in order, as some of the author's allusions have passed out of general knowledge in the century since the tale was written; you will find a few notes at the end of the story.

recommend to young men temperance in eating and drinking. Just so, too, Jacobus Hugo has satisfied himself that, by Euenis, Homer meant to insinuate John Calvin; by Antinous, Martin Luther; by the Lotophagi, Protestants in general; and, by the Harpies, the Dutch. Our more modern Scholiasts are equally acute. These fellows demonstrate a hidden meaning in "The Antediluvians," a parable in "Powhatan," new views in "Cock Robin," and transcendentalism in "Hop O' My Thumb." In short, it has been shown that no man can sit down to write without a very profound design. Thus to authors in general much trouble is spared. A novelist, for example, need have no care of his moral. It is there—that is to say, it is somewhere— and the moral and the critics can take care of themselves. When the proper time arrives, all that the gentleman intended, and all that he did not intend, will be brought to light, in the *Dial*, or the *Down-Easter*, together with all that he ought to have intended, and the rest that he clearly meant to intend:—so that it will all come very straight in the end.

There is no just ground, therefore, for the charge brought against me by certain ignoramuses—that I have never written a moral tale, or, in more precise words, a tale with a moral. They are not the critics predestined to bring me out, and *develop* my morals:—that is the secret. By and by the *North American*

Quarterly Humdrum will make them ashamed of their stupidity. In the meantime, by way of staying execution—by way of mitigating the accusations against me—I offer the sad history appended,—a history about whose obvious moral there can be no question whatever, since he who runs may read it in the large capitals which form the title of the tale. I should have credit for this arrangement—a far wiser one than that of La Fontaine and others, who reserve the impression to be conveyed until the last moment, and thus sneak it in at the fag end of their fables.

Defuncti injuria ne afficiantur was a law of the twelve tables, and *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is an excellent injunction—even if the dead in question be nothing but dead small beer. It is not my design, therefore, to vituperate my deceased friend, Toby Dammit. He was a sad dog, it is true, and a dog's death it was that he died; but he himself was not to blame for his vices. They grew out of a personal defect in his mother. She did her best in the way of flogging him while an infant—for duties to her well-regulated mind were always pleasures, and babies, like tough steaks, or the modern Greek olive trees, are invariably the better for beating—but, poor woman! she had the misfortune to be left-handed, and a child flogged left-handedly had better be left unflogged. The world revolves from right to left. It will not do to whip a baby from left to right. If each blow in the proper direction drives an evil propensity out, it follows that every thump in an opposite one knocks its quota of wickedness in. I was often present at Toby's chastisements, and, even by the way in which he kicked, I could perceive that he was getting worse and worse every day. At last I saw, through the tears in my eyes, that there was no hope of the villain at all, and one day when he had been cuffed until he grew so black in the face that one might have mistaken him for a little African, and no effect had been produced beyond that of making him wriggle himself into a fit, I could stand it no longer, but went down upon my knees forthwith, and, uplifting my voice, made prophecy of his ruin.

The fact is that his precocity in vice was awful. At five months of age he used to get into such passions that he was unable to articulate. At six months, I caught him gnawing a pack of cards.

At seven months he was in the constant habit of catching and kissing the female babies. At eight months he peremptorily refused to put his signature to the Temperance pledge. Thus he went on increasing in iniquity, month after month, until, at the close of the first year, he not only insisted upon wearing *moustaches*, but had contracted a propensity for cursing and swearing, and for backing his assertions by bets.

Through this latter most ungentlemanly practice, the ruin which I had predicted to Tobby Dammit overtook him at last. The fashion had "grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength," so that, when he came to be a man, he could scarcely utter a sentence without interlarding it with a proposition to gamble. Not that he actually *laid* wagers—no. I will do my friend the justice to say that he would as soon have laid eggs. With him the thing was a mere formula—nothing more. His expressions on this head had no meaning attached to them whatever. They were simple if not altogether innocent expletives— imaginative phrases wherewith to round off a sentence. When he said "I'll bet you so and so," nobody ever thought of taking him up; but still I could not help thinking it my duty to put him down. The habit was an immoral one, and so I told him. It was a vulgar one—this I begged him to believe. It was discountenanced by society—here I said nothing but the truth. It was forbidden by act of Congress—here I had not the slightest intention of telling a lie. I remonstrated—but to no purpose. I demonstrated—in vain. I entreated— he smiled. I implored—he laughed. I preached—he sneered. I threatened—he swore. I kicked him—he called for the police. I pulled his nose—he blew it, and offered to bet the devil his head that I would not venture to try that experiment again.

Poverty was another vice which the peculiar physical deficiency of Dammit's mother had entailed upon her son. He was detestably poor; and this was the reason, no doubt, that his expletive expressions about betting, seldom took a pecuniary turn. I will not be bound to say that I ever heard him make use of such a figure of speech as "I'll bet you a dollar." It was usually "I'll bet you what you please," or "I'll bet you what you dare,"

or "I'll bet you a trifle," or else, more significantly still, *"I'll bet the Devil my head."*

This latter form seemed to please him best,—perhaps because it involved the least risk; for Dammit had become excessively parsimonious. Had any one taken him up, his head was small and thus his loss would have been small too. But these are my own reflections, and I am by no means sure that I am right in attributing them to him. At all events the phrase in question grew daily in favor, notwithstanding the gross impropriety of a man betting his brains like bank-notes,—but this was a point which my friend's perversity of disposition would not permit him to comprehend. In the end, he abandoned all other forms of wager, and gave himself up to *"I'll bet the Devil my head,"* with a pertinacity and exclusiveness of devotion that displeased not less than it surprised me. I am always displeased by circumstances for which I cannot account. Mysteries force a man to think, and so injure his health. The truth is, there was something in *the air* with which Mr. Dammit was wont to give utterance to his offensive expression—something in his *manner* of enunciation—which at first interested, and afterward made me very uneasy—something which, for want of a more definite term at present, I must be permitted to call *queer;* but which Mr. Coleridge would have called mystical, Mr. Kant pantheistical, Mr. Carlyle twistical, and Mr. Emerson hyperquizzitistical. I began not to like it at all. Mr. Dammit's soul was in a perilous state. I resolved to bring all my eloquence into play to save it. I vowed to serve him as St. Patrick, in the Irish chronicle, is said to have served the toad,—that is to say, "awaken him to a sense of his situation." I addressed myself to the task forthwith. Once more I betook myself to remonstrance. Again I collected my energies for a final attempt at expostulation.

When I had made an end of my lecture, Mr. Dammit indulged himself in some very equivocal behavior. For some moments he remained silent, merely looking me inquisitively in the face. But presently he threw his head to one side, and elevated his eyebrows to a great extent. Then he spread out the palms of his hands and shrugged up his shoulders. Then he winked with the

right eye. Then he repeated the operation with the left. Then he shut them both up very tight. Then he opened them both so very wide that I became seriously alarmed for the consequences. Then, applying his thumb to his nose, he thought proper to make an indescribable movement with the rest of his fingers. Finally, setting his arms a-kimbo, he condescended to reply.

I can call to mind only the heads of his discourse. He would be obliged to me if I would hold my tongue. He wished none of my advice. He despised all my insinuations. He was old enough to take care of himself. Did I still think him baby Dammit? Did I mean to say any thing against his character? Did I intend to insult him? Was I a fool? Was my maternal parent aware, in a word, of my absence from the domiciliary residence? He would put this latter question to me as to a man of veracity, and he would bind himself to abide by my reply. Once more he would demand explicitly if my mother knew that I was out. My confusion, he said, betrayed me, and he would be willing to bet the Devil his head that she did not.

Mr. Dammit did not pause for my rejoinder. Turning upon his heel, he left my presence with undignified precipitation. It was well for him that he did so. My feelings had been wounded. Even my anger had been aroused. For once I would have taken him up upon his insulting wager. I would have won for the Arch-Enemy Mr. Dammit's little head—for the fact is, my mamma *was* very well aware of my merely temporary absence from home.

But *Khoda shefa midehed*—Heaven gives relief—as the Mussulmans say when you tread upon their toes. It was in pursuance of my duty that I had been insulted, and I bore the insult like a man. It now seemed to me, however, that I had done all that could be required of me, in the case of this miserable individual, and I resolved to trouble him no longer with my counsel, but to leave him to his conscience and himself. But although I forebore to intrude with my advice, I could not bring myself to give up his society altogether. I even went so far as to humor some of his less reprehensible propensities; and there were times when I found myself lauding his wicked jokes, as epicures

do mustard, with tears in my eyes:--so profoundly did it grieve me to hear his evil talk.

One fine day, having strolled out together, arm in arm, our route led us in the direction of a river. There was a bridge, and we resolved to cross it. It was roofed over, by way of protection from the weather, and the archway, having but few windows, was thus very uncomfortably dark. As we entered the passage, the contrast between the external glare and the interior gloom struck heavily upon my spirits. Not so upon those of the unhappy Dammit, who offered to bet the Devil his head that I was hipped. He seemed to be in an unusual good humor. He was excessively lively--so much so that I entertained I know not what of uneasy suspicion. It is not impossible that he was affected with the transcendentals. I am not well enough versed, however, in the diagnosis of this disease to speak with decision upon the point; and unhappily there were none of my friends of the *Dial* present. I suggest the idea, nevertheless, because of a certain species of austere Merry-Andrewism which seemed to beset my poor friend, and caused him to make quite a Tom-Fool of himself. Nothing would serve him but wriggling and skipping about under and over every thing that came in his way; now shouting out, and now lisping out, all manner of odd little and big words, yet preserving the gravest face in the world all the time. I really could not make up my mind whether to kick or to pity him. At length, having passed nearly across the bridge, we approached the termination of the footway, when our progress was impeded by a turnstile of some height. Through this I made my way quietly, pushing it around as usual. But this turn would not serve the turn of Mr. Dammit. He insisted upon leaping the stile, and said he could cut a pigeon-wing over it in the air. Now this, conscientiously speaking, I did not think he could do. The best pigeon-winger over all kinds of style was my friend Mr. Carlyle, and as I knew *he* could not do it, I would not believe that it could be done by Toby Dammit. I therefore told him, in so many words, that he was a braggadocio, and could not do what he said. For this I had reason to be sorry afterward;—for he straightway offered to *bet the Devil his head* that he could.

I was about to reply, notwithstanding my previous resolutions, with some remonstrance against his impiety, when I heard, close at my elbow, a slight cough, which sounded very much like the ejaculation"ahem!" I started, and looked about me in surprise. My glance at length fell into a nook of the framework of the bridge, and upon the figure of a little lame old gentleman of venerable aspect. Nothing could be more reverend than his whole appearance; for he not only had on a full suit of black, but his shirt was perfectly clean and the collar turned very neatly down over a white cravat, while his hair was parted in front like a girl's. His hands were clasped pensively together over the stomach, and his two eyes were carefully rolled up into the top of his head.

Upon observing him more closely, I perceived that he wore a black silk apron over his small-clothes; and this was a thing which I thought very odd. Before I had time to make any remark, however, upon so singular a circumstance, he interrupted me with a second *"ahem!"*

To this observation I was not immediately prepared to reply. The fact is, remarks of this laconic nature are nearly unanswerable. I have known a Quarterly Review *non-plussed* by the word *"Fudge!"* I am not ashamed to say, therefore, that I turned to Mr. Dammit for assistance.

"Dammit," said I, "what are you about? don't you hear-the gentleman says *'ahem!'* " I looked sternly at my friend while I thus addressed him; for, to say the truth, I felt particularly puzzled, and when a man is particularly puzzled he must knit his brows and look savage, or else he is pretty sure to look like a fool.

"Dammit," observed I-although this sounded very much like an oath, than which nothing was further from my thoughts-"Dammit," I suggested -"the gentleman says 'ahem!' "

I do not attempt to defend my remark on the score of profundity; I did not think it profound myself; but I have noticed that the effect of our speeches is not always proportionate with their importance in our own eyes; and if I

had shot Mr. D. through and through with a Paixhan bomb, or knocked him on the head with the "Poets and Poetry of America," he could hardly have been more discomfited than when I addressed him with those simple words: "Dammit, what are you about?—don't you hear?—the gentleman says 'ahem!' "

"You don't say so?" gasped he at length, after turning more colors than a pirate runs up, one after the other, when chased by a man-of-war. "Are you quite sure he said *that?* Well, at all events I am in for it now, and may as well put a bold face upon the matter. Here goes, then—*"ahem!"*

At this the little old gentleman seemed pleased – God only knows why. He left his station at the nook of the bridge, limped forward with a gracious air, took Dammit by the hand and shook it cordially, looking all the while straight up in his face with an air of the most unadulterated benignity which it is possible for the mind of man to imagine.

"I am quite sure you will win it, Dammit," said he, with the frankest of all smiles, "but we are obliged to have a trial, you know, for the sake of mere form."

"Ahem!" replied my friend, taking off his coat, with a deep sigh, tying a pocket-handkerchief around his waist, and producing an unaccountable alteration in his countenance by twisting up his eyes and bringing down the corners of his mouth—"ahem!" And "ahem!" said he again, after a pause; and not another word more than "ahem!" did I ever know him to say after that. "Aha!" thought I, without expressing myself aloud,—"this is quite a remarkable silence on the part of Toby Dammit, and is no doubt a consequence of his verbosity upon a previous occasion. One extreme induces another. I wonder if he has forgotten the many unanswerable questions which he propounded to me so fluently on the day when I gave him my last lecture? At all events, he is cured of the transcendentals."

"Ahem!" here replied Toby, just as if he had been reading my thoughts, and looking like a very old sheep in a revery.

The old gentleman now took him by the arm, and led him more into the shade of the bridge—a few paces back from the turnstile. "My good fellow," said he, "I make it a point of

conscience to allow you this much run. Wait here, till I take my place by the stile, so that I may see whether you go over it handsomely, and transcendentally, and don't omit any flourishes of the pigeon-wing. A mere form, you know. I will say 'one, two, three, and away.' Mind you, start at the word 'away.' " Here he took his position by the stile, paused a moment as if in profound reflection, then *looked up* and I thought, smiled very slightly, then tightened the strings of his apron, then took a long look at Dammit, and finally gave the word as agreed upon–

One–two–three–and–away!

Punctually at the word "away," my poor friend set off in a strong gallopThe style was not very high, like Mr. Lord's–nor yet very low, like that of Mr. Lord's reviewers, but upon the whole I made sure that he would clear it. And then what if he did not?–ah, that was the question–what if he did not? "What right," said I, "had the old gentleman to make any other gentleman jump? The little old dot-and-carry-one! who is *he?* If he asks *me* to jump, I won't do it, that's flat, and I don't care who *the devil he is.*" The bridge, as I say, was arched and covered in, in a very ridiculous manner, and there was a most uncomfortable echo about it at all times–an echo which I never before so particularly observed as when I uttered the four last words of my remark.

But what I said, or what I thought, or what I heard, occupied only an instant. In less than five seconds from his starting, my poor Toby had taken the leap. I saw him run nimbly, and spring grandly from the floor of the bridge, cutting the most awful flourishes with his legs as he went up. I saw him high in the air, pigeon-winging it to admiration just over the top of the stile; and of course I thought it an unusually singular thing that he did not *continue* to go over. But the whole leap was the affair of a moment, and, before I had a chance to make any profound reflections, down came Mr. Dammit on the flat of his back, on the same side of the stile from which he had started. At the same

(turn to page 123)

A TASTE OF RAIN AND DARKNESS

by Eddie C. Bertin

EDDIE C. BERTIN lives in Belgium and writes in Dutch. This tale, as with the other two we have published *(The Whispering Thing* in *WEIRD TERROR TALES No. 1, The Man Who Collected Eyes,* in *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES No. 16)* was originally written in Dutch, then translated into English by the author.

NIGHT HAD CRAWLED OVER THE CITY, as a slug over a small fish. In thick layers, she had drowned the evening sounds, until now there was only the silence of darkness and the rain. Night was a mother for her children, protecting them, smoothing them in her black cloak. Soft and tender and terrifying.

The street was empty now, the throbbing of its life-blood ebbed away with the going of its inhabitants. The dim light of a few lanterns created false twilights in the deep portals and corners of the old houses, and gave a wet glitter to the pavement. It changed the downpouring November rain into a silver-threaded spiderweb, with downgliding pearls.

He was an unmoving statue, a part of the darkness and the

rain. The wetness seeped ice-fingers through his drenched coat. He waited, with his closed hands protecting the spark of fire in his cupped palms, a half-finished cigarette. He waited, as he had waited ten years ago, and nine years ago, and every night between the seventh and the eighth November. It rained, as it always rained that night, every damned year.

He hated the waiting.

At last the fire burned the palms of his hands, and he threw the rest of the cigarette away, knowing with a sick certainty that it was exactly the same part of a second he had thrown his cigarette away ten years ago, and nine years ago, and seven years ago . . .

A church bell started chiming in the distance, the echoes of its strokes shattering through his ears and brain. Eleven strokes.

Eleven strokes of horror, creating false images in the rain curtain in his brain. Lightning flashed, drawing with an electric pencil a short nightmare vision out of a surrealist painting, the houses as waiting sentinels with dead eyes and hungry mouths, the pavement stones upturned faces under his feet in unreal light, just before the shadows closed again their eager tentacles around him.

It was like a short awakening from the climax of a nightmare, a moment of petrified time, the exact face of terror unremembered, but the fear running on and on through his veins.

It would be soon now. The waiting was almost finished.

Footfalls. Light steps from high-heeled shoes, sharply ticking sounds like a lonely clock. They came through the curtain of rain and darkness, walking through the still echoing sound of the church bells, through the empty street. Footsteps, where a few seconds before there had been nothing but silence. She must have come from one of the many small side streets, suddenly taking a corner. That was why he heard her approaching so clearly suddenly. Not that it mattered, he'd known they were coming. The footsteps were what he'd been waiting for.

They came nearer, their sounds gliding through the separating layers of rain, now almost beside him. A second bolt of lightning

cut the sky, dimmed through the downpour, and he saw her face.

The white pastel face, wetness glittering as sparks on the colorless cheeks, and the half-open, red painted mouth. Water pearls on her black hair, falling in her eyes, a mass of dripping wetness; the classical straight nose with the quick-moving nostrils; the blued eyelids and the far-looking eyes, seeing in a distance which she alone could perceive. She passed by, unconscious of his presence. The lightning had gone, and the rain kept on falling from the open skies. Her high-heeled shoes clattered against the silence, as she went, the darkness closing after her passage.

He started to follow her. He knew the way very well now, every street, every damn corner, as seconds submerged in the eternity of ten years of torture. He lighted a new cigarette, and had to throw it away because it was wet immediately, and crumbled into a brown pulp mass between his fingers.

The light invited him, the only beacon before him in the darkness, changed and slightly pulsating through the rain fog. He stumbled from the three small steps and then was inside the cafe. Cold dampness welled out of the cellar, but it was still better than the wetness outside. At first there was only the thick blue-gray tobacco-smoke cloud, slowly crawling through the low ceiled room. Then his tearful eyes accustomed themselves to the moving fog, and he started to see. The ceiling was very low indeed, and rested on heavy wooden pillars.

There was a poor-looking bar at the other end, and besides it a juke-box, cold and dead with a big, crudely lettered sign *"Out Of Use."*

The left and right sides contained about five wooden tables each, and posters decorated the walls, their colors faded and their corners wrinkled and brown. A few would-be artists, bearded, in ragged trousers and heavy pulls, were seated extremely left, the origin of the tobacco fog.

The entering man received a short nod from the barkeeper, who was wrestling with his towel and dusty glasses, as if he was trying to scrub his emptiness off on them.

She was seated at the third table on the right, the same place

as before. Oh God, if only *one* small detail would be different this year. But then, it never was, and the nightmare continued, carrying him along, unresisting, while each small detail of the night fitted into the other ones, as a clock's inner wheels. She was just sitting on her chair, with the neutral gray bag in her hand, and the untouched cup of coffee before her on the round table, losing its warmth in steady curls of smoke, slowly crawling up to the ceiling.

He went over to her and sat down in the chair opposite her. There was no sign of recognition from her, she didn't even acknowledge his presence; he was a ghost among the living. He observed her carefully, the patterns of ten years superimposing like paintings on glass plates, placed upon each other. She was pretty and well built, with just the right proportions where they belonged. On her, even the formless raincoat looked like something very feminine.

Her hands were lying across her handbag. She didn't wear gloves, and he saw she had no rings on her fingers. Her hands were long and small, and very white—the hands of a secretary or a typist.

Her eyes were focused on the faded wall posters, but she saw through them, almost as if she studied the cracks and spider webs of the naked wall beyond them. He didn't try to start a conversation; it would be completely useless. She wouldn't react in any way, not even when he would touch her. To her, he didn't exist; he could as well be just another wall poster, to be neglected and stared through, just like the others whose discolored smiles were grinning down on him. He was just a player in the dark game, a toy without a life of his own.

The proprietor came over to him, and he ordered a glass of cheap red wine. After being paid his fifteen francs, the barman returned to the bar and continued whipping imaginary dust from his beer glasses.

The man nipped from his glass, and put it down again. He waited for her to turn, which she did exactly at seventeen minutes past twelve. Slowly she revolved in her chair, and he saw the gliding movements of her hands, as coiled snakes over her

well formed legs. Her skirt had crawled up, and he had a short glimpse of the softness of her leg above her stockings. As a statue on a moving showpiece, her profile turned, and the cold gray knowing eyes met his for a split second—a dip into a deep fog, which left him shivering.

At exactly half past twelve, when the chimes sounded, she checked the time on her wrist watch, then stood up and left. The night closed after her, as if she'd never been there.

He called the bartender, and asked him the question he had asked over and over again in those ten years, the question whose answer was engraved with letters of ice in his shrieking mind.

"Do you know the woman who was sitting here with me?"

The bartender looked surprised and suspicious. "Woman? What woman? Excuse me, but you have been sitting here alone for over twenty minutes. All by yourself." He went back to his bar; his hands crawled like two enormous fat white-bellied spiders over the glasses and bottles, and he shot half-angered glances at the man who asked such questions.

The man had known it all the time, and his beating heart was changed into a big freezing room, from which ice water was pumped through his veins. The coldness was all over his stomach. He slowly was preparing himself for hell. He left, too, and the night engulfed him, suspicious, hostile. He had walked that night ten years, had tasted every bitter drop of rain and darkness and fear, and yet still he was an outsider, someone beyond even the laws of darkness.

He followed the street, the sound of his nailed shoes following him . . . tik . . . tik . . . tik. . .tik. . . . . If he could only stop them; but he couldn't, and the sound went on and on, echoing through his mind. The dead eyes of the houses he passed looked down on him. Go away, they shrieked, go away from us, you don't belong. Their mouth doors were closed to him, as to all unwanted night creatures. And his feet walked on, carrying him with them, like their own private zombie. How he wanted to stop them. But just as he hadn't stopped them ten years ago, so he couldn't now. Tik, tik, tik, the sounds crawling up the house walls, and falling down on him, burying him, petrifying his brain,

like an insect caught in wax, fossilized. His mind didn't react now; it cowered inside his skull, screaming soundlessly, and his body, the frozen flesh and blood machine, went along the empty street, following the girl before him.

Now he had seen her, quickly stepping. When he had approached her to ten meter's distance, he knew that she had heard him. This was where and when she always heard him coming nearer, the hunter closing in on the game. She looked over her shoulder, puzzled, then frightened. She hurried her steps, tik, tik, tik, meaningless echoes in a night for fear. Now five meters, now four, now three, his own steps smothering hers. Two meters, it all went so quick now; she started running, too late, much too late—damn you, why didn't you run earlier when there was still time? Now there's no time left, now, now, not ever! He stretched out his hands across ten years.

He wished he could cry out the horror cupped inside him. If he could only stop this time circle and end the game, but he couldn't, he never could. His feet ran, and his arms went out like striking snakes; his hands very young, and very white, the veins as cords running under his skin, blood pumping through them at the speeded up rhythm of his heart beat. He felt the excitement crawling like an uneasy animal in his belly, beating in his brain, drowning everything else except the horror. Then she turned and opened her mouth to scream, and his hands closed around her throat.

Her mouth stayed open, her teeth flashing as she curled up her lips like a snarling cat. He pushed her against the wall of a house, the light of a nearby lantern spilling over her face, like a faded close-up. He was almost one with her squirming body, feeling every movement of it against his own. She tried to kick, but his legs were between hers and stopped the frantic movements. She made small sounds, krrh, ahrrg, and her nails made bloody patterns on his iron hands. They felt the softness of her throat, the pulsing power of her aorta, as they pressed and pressed; the convulsive movements of her adam's apple; her gasping mouth open to the night and the rain. The excitement was all over his body now, and he felt his legs tremble with red waves pulsing.

Her face grew dark, as her eyes grew wide and the tongue came out of her mouth, dark and swollen between her teeth, lolling out of her gasping mouth. Spittle dripped on his hands. Her body made short shaking movements, a small animal running crazy in a trap, slowly dying. Only his brain kept screaming, *stop it, goddamnyou stopitstopitstopit,* but it didn't stop. He felt the corners of his mouth draw up, forming the insane grin his face had worn that time, his breath coming in groaning gasps. She suddenly made a last gurgling sound and stiffened, her eyes bulging as those of a frog, her legs making one last convulsive movement.

His hands loosened their grip, and her shawl stayed between his fingers. She stayed upright against the wall, her eyes staring doors into emptiness, her lolling tongue a dark piece of paper put against her blue lips. He leaned against the wall, wishing desperately to be sick, but again he couldn't. Time restarted running, and as he looked, her left eye became fluid and ran across her cheek, leaving a wet slimy trail like a snail's. Her right eye followed, and blood started streaming from the holes, then dried up and left dusty trails. Her body sagged slowly, while the flesh of her face decayed, first the cheeks falling inwards in her mouth, then crumbling into rotting flesh. Yellow bones came splintering through, as the face fell further into ashes, the teeth making small rattling sounds as they clattered upon the street stones. The disintegrating body fell upon its knees, then slowly keeled backwards, to the sound of cracking bones and tearing rotted flesh and muscles.

Then he turned and began to run through the horror-ridden streets of night, the slightest sound of high-heeled footsteps following him and meeting him from every corner, her dying rattle echoing from every black window. At last, when he couldn't run any more, he fell flat on his face, his hands beating the stones until the blood ran from them and stained his clothes. Then he was very sick, and when his insides stopped turning inside out, and he stopped panting, he looked up at the rain shrouded stars and prayed, "My God, please *PLEASE LET IT BE*

THE LAST TIME, LET IT BE FINISHED NOW." A senseless prayer, because he *knew.*

He knew that next year, the night of November seventh, he would again stand in the lonely street, smoking a cigarette in the downpouring rain, tasting the rain and the darkness, waiting for the sound of her high heels. He looked at his hands. They were old and tired, without any strength left; but next year again, they would become the claws of the other, waiting one, deep inside him, while he again would be no more than a watching, tormented machine. He felt the shawl he still held in his hand, and kneaded it into a silken mass in his hot face, the last straw before the opening edge of definite madness, so near and yet never near enough for him.. How senseless, his prayer. If there was a God, it was the God from the Old Testament, who wanted an eye for an eye. Because she had not really been there. He knew that as sure, like the fact that the shawl between his clasped fingers would turn into dust, mixing with the mud on his shoes, as soon as he entered the threshold of his home.

THE "V" FORCE

by Fred C. Smale

Frank A. Munsey was a real science-fiction/weird fiction fan, and he was never happy when an issue of one of his magazines which allowed for this sort of story came out without an imaginative, "different" tale in it. *ALL STORY MAGAZINE* and *ARGOSY* were his chief vehicles for indulging his hobby and it was here that many authors whose names would become household words for the lover of fantasy either first appeared or received their first real nurture. But in addition to such names as Edgar Rice Burroughs, Otis Adelbert Kline, Ralph Milne Farley, George Allan England, and Murray Leinster, there were many others who wrote this sort of story now and then, without specializing in it. I cannot tell you anything about FRED C. SMALE's work aside from this story, but the skill with which it is told certainly suggests that he wasn't a one-timer.

I EXAMINED the bar of metal closely. Subsequent measurements showed it to be fourteen inches long, three inches wide, and three-quarters of an inch thick. On the broad surface, about the center, was engraved a circle with strokes radiating from it, possibly a conventionalized representation of the sun. Beyond this no marks were visible.

The metal itself, so far as I could judge, was a very hard steel with a curious ruddy iridescence on the surface, somewhat reminding me of the appearance of "shot" silk. When suspended between the fingers and thumb and struck sharply it rang with a clear bell-like note. Evidently there was no flaw in the metal.

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"Do you believe it?" I asked, looking up from my examination.

Walter Surtees shrugged "Twenty years' residence in the East, from 1892 to 1912 a few months before we met," said he "have taught me to believe many stranger things."

"But this," I protested. "A mere bar of inanimate metal to have all the powers you ascribe—"

"Excuse me," he corrected. "I don't ascribe any powers to it. At least you haven't heard me do so yet. I have merely retailed to you the statement made to me by the Thibetan priest who gave it to me."

"Has it the ordinary magnetic properties?" said I. "But of course you have thought of that." Walter Surtees smiled.

"Yes, I have tested it, but it doesn't even lift iron-filings. No, it isn't a mere bar-magnet, whatever it is."

"But that stuff about the 'periodic powers,' " said I. "If there is anything in it at all it must be permanent. I am inclined to

think the whole thing is a fable. I dare say those artful priests were able to play some curious tricks with it. It's their business."

My new friend looked queerly at me for a moment before he spoke. "Well, to be frank with you," said he, "there is something supernormal about it. I haven't confined my experiments to poking it among iron-filings."

"What else, then?" I asked curiously.

"It shines in the dark, for one thing," he replied.

I laughed. "Radium," I suggested. "Possibly it contains a minute quantity. But that wasn't what you were going to tell me. You would hardly call looking at it in the dark an experiment."

Surtees rose and went to the door of the room. "You shall see for yourself," said he.

He opened the door and whistled softly. Presently a huge, gray cat insinuated itself into the room and rubbed itself affectionately against my friend's leg, purring.

Surtees closed the door and returned to his chair. "Now watch," said he.

The cat followed him for a yard or two, then it seemed to grow suddenly uneasy. Its fur rose and its tail became enlarged.

In obedience to a sign from Surtees I placed the bar, which I was still holding, on the floor. The cat watched it as though fascinated and mewed plaintively. It now seemed more terrified than angry.

Slowly, as though against its will, the animal drew nearer with a curious sidling movement until at last it lay close to the bar, motionless and apparently exhausted.

"That is certainly queer," said I thoughtfully, "I say," I added, looking up sharply, "You're not playing any parlor magic tricks, old chap?"

Walter Surtees shook his head gravely. He was watching the cat.

"There may be some odor clinging to it which we cannot ourselves detect," I suggested, "and which the cat can, and finds rather overpowering."

"I never knew an odor to affect a cat or any other animal in that fashion," returned Surtees. "This morning it only fluffed up

and swore at the thing. Now it seems to be decidedly more impressed."

He rose and lifted the cat gently. Then he started and examined the animal closely. "Why, it's dead!" he cried.

"Dead!" I echoed. "Nonsense!"

"Dead as mutton," repeated Surtees. "Luckily it is my own cat and not the landlady's. Poor brute! I was going to show you something else. The canary—"

"No, thanks," said I. "We'll spare the canary, if you don't mind."

After spending some time in futile examinations of both bar and poor pussy, we left the bar where I had placed it on the carpet and passed to some other of my friend's curios.

But it was of no use. That infernal bar fascinated both of us. At last Surtees muttered something under his breath, and picking it up, replaced it carefully in a leather case.

"You take good care of it," I remarked.

"It may resent neglect," he replied lightly.

"Look here, old chap," said I suddenly, "if I were you I'd take an early train to Brighton or Southend and chuck that thing off the end of a pier—leather case and all."

"I am waiting to see what will happen," he returned in a curious dull tone. "I intend to see it out."

"Is there nothing that will check its influence?" I suggested. "No antidote?"

"Nothing opaque to it, so to speak. I have thought of that. I tried lots of things this morning. Glass, electrified and normal—silk, water, shellac, a score of other things. I even borrowed an air-pump from the science school yonder and tried a vacuum. No use, any of it."

"Didn't you learn anything of its nature from the man who gave it to you?"

"He simply told me that he had taken it from the robe of a fellow priest, whom he found crushed to death."

"Crushed to death! How?"

Walter Surtees shrugged. "Some sort of panic, I believe. There

was a big crowd of fanatics at some shrine or other, and this man seemed to have got underfoot. The story was very vague."

"And he had this thing on him," said I, musingly looking at the case on the table.

Surtees nodded.

I rose, and as I did so I swayed suddenly.

"Hold up—what's the matter—dizzy?" exclaimed Surtees.

"It's that confounded juju of yours," I gasped, catching sight of a rather white face in the mirror. I pulled myself together and reached the door.

"I've found a better name for it than that," said Walter Surtees. "The 'V' force. The vital force, you know."

"We'll leave it at that," said I, feeling angry with myself and the mysterious drawing power which I still felt, though less strongly. "Call it what you like, but I repeat my advice. Get rid of it or it may play cat-tricks with you." And I touched the dead animal with my foot.

Surtees seemed preoccupied and scarcely replied to my "Good night."

I went slowly down the stairs with an uneasy feeling that I was leaving him to face some unknown danger alone. I hesitated and half turned back. Then I heard the piano. Surtees was playing one of his favorite "songs without words." I laughed to myself.

"Music hath charms," I muttered. "It may soothe even a steel bar."

Yet I could not shake off the memory of that poor brute of a cat and the mysterious suddenness with which death had come to it.

Two days afterward I was at Bexhill on some business connected with property I had there. I found it necessary to stay the night, and as I was leaving my hotel for a stroll and last pipe before going to bed the boots handed me a telegram. It was from Surtees, forwarded to me from my town address. The message was brief but sufficiently disturbing. It ran:

Come to Pelham Street at once. Urgent. Surtees.

Finding it was impossible for me to reach Pelham Street until

well after midnight, I hastily wrote a letter, explaining my sudden change of plan and left it for the man with whom I had an appointment in the morning.

At first the matter of the bar did not occur to me, and, as Surtees was of rather an impulsive nature, I thought his desire to see me might have its origin in some legal bother connected with a certain troublesome brother of his, of whom I knew.

It was a dark, foggy night when I arrived at Pelham Street, and the raw mist seemed to penetrate to my bones. There was a faint glow in the window of Surtees' sitting-room—not bright enough to indicate that he was up and about—but more as though a bright, clear fire had been left burning in the grate. Then I remembered that he used a gas-heater, and was momentarily puzzled.

There seeming nothing to indicate impatience or anxiety on his part, as I had run out of tobacco, I decided to go on to the public-house at the corner—it was not yet midnight—and replenish my stock before seeing Surtees, who smoked a brand too potent for me.

I strode on past the house with this intent, when suddenly my legs became leaden and I felt as though I were battling against a strong head wind. Yet the murky stillness of the atmosphere told me that such was not the case. I strove against the unseen power which was holding me back, but with each step it grew stronger.

The street was deserted or my quaint struggles might have roused some doubts as to my sobriety.

As I paused in bewilderment a ragged tramp came shuffling along. As he passed me he gave a curious growl and staggered against the wall. With odd inconsistency I muttered "Drunk!" and, obeying an uncontrollable impulse, I stepped back to the door of Surtees' lodgings and rang the bell.

Getting no reply, I tried the door, found it unlocked, and, breathing slightly quicker than usual, I mounted the stairs and knocked at Surtees' door.

"Who is there?" asked a low, muffled voice, which I nevertheless recognized as that of my friend, and I answered sharply.

"Thank Heaven!" said the voice. "Come in—but take care—take care!"

I opened the door and beheld a strange scene.

Surtees lay in a huddled position on the floor. Close to his face—within twelve inches—was the bar. It shone with a dull radiance, which filled the room, and by its light I saw that Surtees' eyes were fixed upon it and slightly crossed as in a hypnotic trance.

As I stood momentarily in horrified surprise I became conscious of an almost overwhelming desire to grovel on the floor also. Something seemed to draw me forward and downward with compelling force. Surtees spoke jerkily and as a man struggling breathlessly with an opponent.

"Thank Heaven—in time—I hope!" he gasped, while I grasped the door-lintel and listened.

"Discovered—antidote!" he went on after a moment. "Direct sunlight—even daylight—weakens—nights—powerful—stronger each night—My Lord!" He broke off with a scream. "It draws life!" he moaned.

He had never turned his eyes to me once all this time, and he now collapsed limply by the side of the accursed bar. "Look out!" he whispered.

At first I thought he meant this simply as a warning to myself. Then his real meaning flashed upon me and, bracing myself up, I made determinedly for the window. I reached it in a staggering, drunken fashion and, moving the blind aside, peeped down into the street below, my head humming like a beehive the while.

Three figures, including a policeman, were loitering with apparent aimlessness directly beneath.

As I looked a stout man came hastening along. I caught sight of his purple, anxious face in the light of a lamp. When he came up he checked his pace abruptly and lurched aside. The policeman seized him and held him up, while the other two men seemed to look stupidly on.

The sound of the constable's gruff voice came faintly to my ear. Now came a horsecart, driven rapidly. Directly beneath, the

horse reared up on his haunches. There were shouts and a crash. The cart had turned over.

The street all at once seemed full of people and a woman's scream rang out shrilly. I dropped the blind and turned aside.

"What does this mean?" I asked, and my voice shook. "Surely this devilish thing—"

Surtees turned his bloodshot eyes on me with an effort. "I cannot check," he whispered hoarsely. "All—London—crushed—death! Crowd—mob—panic!"

"What must we do?" I cried.

"Big risk—"

I made a gesture of impatience, the movement turned to burlesque by the force which I felt dragging at every nerve and muscle. What could be worse than our present position?

"We'll beat it somehow," I said.

"Make—rush!" said Surtees, faintly.

I had unconsciously crept to his side, and we spoke in whispers.

"What—how?" I said vaguely. I felt a leaden dullness coming over me.

Walter Surtees gave an odd, croaking laugh. "A chase!"

"And if we cannot get away?"

"Remember—priest of Llassi!" was his reply.

"Come, then," said I. "The sooner the better. I am the stronger. I'll take it."

"No," whispered Surtees promptly. There was not time for argument. "Let us carry it together," said I. "Your right hand; my left."

He nodded. "Glove," he muttered. I understood and drew off the thick glove from his left hand and placed it on my own.

"Now," said I.

"Ready!" he muttered between clenched teeth. We stretched out our hands together.

The bar seemed to leap toward us and there was a sound of impact as it met our hands, as though it were welded to us. I shuddered. We leaped to our feet, a curious sense of power tingling through our veins. The spell seemed to have been broken.

Meanwhile, the sounds outside had risen to a roar, and the street was filled by a seething, panic-stricken mob.

"The back!" cried Surtees. We dashed from the room, holding the bar between us. Our strength seemed irresistible. We moved as one individual, and even our unspoken thoughts seemed in unison.

We burst through the flimsy door leading to the back premises, carrying it clear off its hinges; and I afterward found that the jagged iron of one of these had caused a nasty gash in my shoulder.

I felt nothing then.

On we raced, through a yard and into a narrow lane. Then, without a word passing between us, we burst off like some quaint quadruped. For a few minutes we saw no one, then suddenly we found ourselves in a main thoroughfare—the Edgeware Road, I think but am not sure.

It was now nearly one in the morning and very few people were about; but we were dimly conscious of curious swervings on the part of those we did pass, and presently we heard the pattering of footsteps behind us. We kept to the center of the road, which at that hour presented few obstacles. We could not have dropped the bar now even had we desired to do so.

Our pursuers seemed to be growing in numbers. They were horribly silent. There were no shouts, no cries to those ahead to stop us. Only that fearsome patter of many feet behind.

We dived down a side street which took us into an open space—Norfolk Crescent, we found it to be afterward. It might have been the top of the monument for all we knew then. Apparently our pursuers had received a check, but, even as we paused a second, the head of the procession poured into the crescent.

At the curb stood a car. "Quick!" panted Surtees, hoarsely, speaking for the first time during our flight.

We literally flew to the car. The chauffeur was dozing. As we came up he lurched sidewise and fell almost at our feet. We scrambled over him into the car, and, while Surtees seized the wheel with his free hand, I started the car.

The vision of a wild-eyed man, clutching vainly at the back of the car, danced momentarily across my vision. I reached back to fling him off, and the sea of fierce, gibbering faces seemed to glide smoothly away.

I looked round dazedly. We were on a broad road which appeared to stretch away into infinity. Surtees sat beside me, his jaw set like iron, and his eyes glowing like live coals under his knit brows.

"Cannot we drop this infernal thing? It is like being handcuffed," said I.

I had no need to raise my voice. The car was almost noiseless.

"Try," said Surtees grimly.

But my hand felt paralyzed. I realized that I had no power over it. But I was desperate. It seemed ridiculous that I should not be able to conquer this mere piece of metal. Lowering the bar, of course with Surtees' hand as well, I placed my foot upon it and we wrenched our bodies back suddenly.

I groaned with pain. Half the flesh seemed torn from my hand, but we were free and our tyrant lay at the bottom of the car.

"Shall I kick it out?" said I.

"No—no!" replied Surtees. "The sea!"

I understood. He meant to give this thing effectual burial.

I leaned back and laughed a little. I was just beginning to realize what we had done and were doing. "Where are we?" I asked.

"Great Bath Road," he answered.

"But the sea!" I exclaimed. "Why not the Norfolk or Sussex coast?"

"I didn't stop to think it out," returned Surtees dryly.

"Then we must go on—"

"Until dawn."

"And then—"

"Relief and freedom," said Surtees, his eyes fixed on the road before him.

The houses were thinning now and there were no lights. Fortunately those of the car were powerful.

"Well, we are free now," said I, "if it comes to that."

"Try to rise," was Surtees' comment; only don't fall out."

I seized the side of the car and strove to raise myself from the seat. It was impossible and I sank back in renewed dismay. It was as though we were bound down by iron bands.

"Sunlight the only antidote." My friend's words flashed through my brain. Truly, we must go on, until the dawn.

"Is there petrol enough?" I asked.

"I hope so."

"Where are we going?"

"Devon or Cornwall. What is the time?" My watch had stopped, but just then we heard a bell somewhere give a solitary stroke. "One," said Surtees. "Sunrise half past six or thereabouts—over five hours."

The effects of our violent exercise were passing off, and after binding up Surtees' wounded hand as well as my own, I took new heart.

We had met very few motors, and we were going at too great a speed for the bar to have any effect on those.

When we overtook anything, however, it was different. This only happened once, between Slough and Maidenhead. On a long stretch of road we rapidly overhauled the red light of another car, and as we came within thirty yards or so it suddenly slackened speed so that we almost dashed into it.

We swerved aside and dashed by. The other car seemed to leap at us and the occupants to tumble together of a heap. I set my teeth and held tight, but we just managed to clear them. Only our great speed saved them and us from what would no doubt have been a particularly complicated smash-up.

It must have been a very mystified party of motorists that we left behind, but we never learned that any one of them was hurt. Fortunately, throughout the whole of our journey the experience was not repeated.

I need not detail the entire course of that trying journey. We got no chance to eat. Luckily the car held out, and the gray light dawn overtook us on the north coast of Cornwall, where we drew upat last somewhere between Padstow and Newquay, near the edge of high cliffs directly overlooking the sea.

Our red-rimmed eyes looked out from pallid, dust-begrimed faces over a slate-colored expanse of water. We were cold and faint with hunger.

With an effort I managed to drag myself from the car, but was for some minutes unable to stand. Natural stiffness seemed all we had to contend with now. True, our limbs seemed leaden and we lurched drunkenly against the side of the car; but presently we realized that the dread power of the bar was almost if not quite vanished.

What would we have not given for a good stiff drink or even hot coffee—tea—anything to ease our parched throats and warm our chilled blood!

Presently the ruddy rim of sun shot over the horizon to our right, and Surtees, staggering to the car, seized the bar recklessly. He hold it to the ruddy beams of the rising monarch which were struggling through the wintry morning mist.

He gave a crazy, chuckling laugh. Then his face changed and a furious expression came over it.

"The devil take it!" he cried, and, turning seaward, he drew back his arm and flung the bar with all his strength far out over the dull-gray waters.

We could not discern the tiny splash where if fell some twenty or thirty yards from the shore and in, as we afterward ascertained, about twenty-eight fathoms of water.

We stood gazing dumbly for a moment. Then we realized that we were at last rid of our ghastly incubus and we danced on the grassy sward like lunatics.

"Sorry for the fish," said I.

"Whatever the infernal thing can do," said Surtees, "it can't rise from the sea."

We turned to the car and our eyes met. Surtees laughed rather grimly. "We are in for trouble," said he.

"On the contrary, we are just rid of it," I returned lightly. "We have only to explain—"

I paused, and Surtees laughed again. "Who will believe?" said he. "No—we must clear out. The machine is useless to us now. There is no petrol. We must leave it here."

I stood doubtfully and was about to make some suggestion, I know not what, when a glance seaward drove the blood from my face afresh. "Look—look!" I cried.

At the spot where the bar had sunk was a huge mound of water like a gigantic wave. The surface of it was white with foam, and though it was as yet in the shadow of the cliff I thought I could discern something writhing and leaping therefrom.

Walter Surtees and I gazed spellbound. A sea-fog was rolling in rapidly, growing denser every moment, and before it blotted the great tossing wave from our view, I fancied I saw a terrible, scaly head arise from the turmoil. A hideous monster with wildly shirling tentacles and ghastly, wideopen eyes.

Then the fog hid all. We lingered no longer, but turned and ran wildly, where, we knew not. Anywhere away from that awful nightmare.

We escaped all awkward inquiries more by luck than anything else. We found ourselves possessed of a few pounds in cash, enough to take us safely to Falmouth and thence to Jersey and France, where we lay hidden for a while.

The English newspapers were particularly interesting to us, the next few days.

We read how the Hon. Stockwood Ridgeway's car had been found deserted on the Cornish cliffs; of the mysterious happenings in the neighborhood of Pelham Street, W., and of the no less inexplicable slaughter of fish near the coast where the car was found, some hundreds of tons being cast up on the neighboring sands every tide for some weeks following. And, curiously enough, the "riot," as it was termed, in Pelham Street, of which, after all, a few broken limbs were the worst results, was never connected in any way by the press with the "hiring" of the car.

I suppose our exit by the back door and dash down the lane broke the link which might have somewhat enlightened the public. Yet what more would they have learned? What do even Walter and I know, after all? Where is the accursed bar now?

Walter Surtees suggests that some ill advised marine animal has

swallowed it and borne it off to spread calamity in other climes when its periodic power shall return.

I have sometimes wondered whether this story may not contain a clue to the fatal and unaccountable deviations of ships from the correct courses when near the Cornish coasts.

However, here my story ends, as far as I know it. I hope it may never have a sequel.

NEVER BET THE DEVIL YOUR HEAD

(continued from page 101)

instant I saw the old gentleman limping off at the top of his speed, having caught and wrapt up in his apron something that fell heavily into it from the darkness of the arch just over the turnstile. At all this I was much astonished; but I had no leisure to think, for Dammit lay particularly still, and I concluded that his feelings had been hurt, and that he stood in need of my assistance. I hurried up to him and found that he had received what might be termed a serious injury. The truth is, he had been deprived of his head, which after a close search I could not find anywhere; so I determined to take him home and send for the homoeopathists. In the meantime a thought struck me, and I threw open an adjacent window of the bridge, when the sad truth flashed upon me at once. About five feet just above the top of the turnstile, and crossing the arch of the footpath so as to constitute a brace, there extended a flat iron bar, lying with its breadth horizontally, and forming one of a series that served to strengthen the structure throughout its extent. With the edge of

this brace it appeared evident that the neck of my unfortunate friend had come precisely in contact.

He did not long survive his terrible loss. The homoeopathists did not give him little enough physic, and what little they did give him he hesitated to take. So in the end he grew worse, and at length died, a lesson to all riotous livers. I bedewed his grave with my tears, worked *a bar* sinister on his family escutcheon, and, for the general expenses of his funeral, sent in my very moderate bill to the transcendentalists. The scoundrels refused to pay it, so I had Mr. Dammit dug up at once, and sold him for dog's meat.

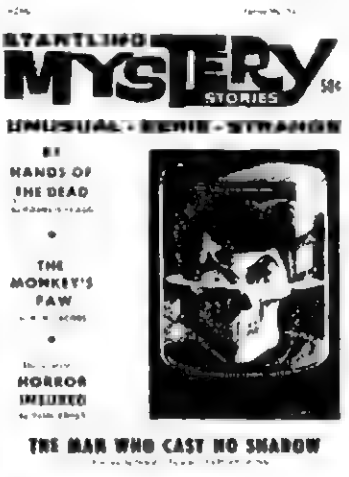
NOTES

Transcendentalism was a New England version of Oriental (particularly Hindu and Buddhist) philosophy which became a fad and a butt of humorists. Ralph Waldo Emerson could be considered its leading exponent.

THE DIAL was the official organ of the transcendentalists, and was the first of four American magazines, independent of each other, to use this title. It ran from 1840 to 1844, under the editorship of Margaret Fuller. Emerson became editor in its final year.

The devil is depicted as a lame gentleman in some legends.

William Wilberforce Lord (1819-1907), clergyman and poet, was hailed as an American Milton. Poe saw him quite differently, and had low things to say about his high style. Lord burlesqued *The Raven* among other offenses, so far as EAP was concerned. Homeopathic Medicine, wherein doses were as close to microscopic as possible, was also a fad and a butt of humor in Poe's time.



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The Editor's Page

(continued from page 9)

warrants and there are books, etc., to review. However, this latter will more or less be confined to new or newly reprinted fantasy of which I am supplied copies by the publisher; and since these are frequently books of considerable length, and my reading time is limited, I cannot promise anything like promptness--so I shan't bother with material which may be long gone from availability by the time my comments could appear.

All the fiction we publish in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*, and *WEIRD TERROR TALES* is within the realm of fantasy, so you may be wondering just how different the stories we plan to use here will be from those you can find in the other three titles. Heretofore, MOH has had the broadest base; now, some stories of the sort which, when we have published examples in MOH, a sizeable fraction of you have said: "Good, but not really in keeping with the magazine," will have a more fitting home. Had we had a fantasy title at the time Dr. Keller's *Tales From Cornwall* started, they would have gone here. I cannot agree that they are entirely out of place in a magazine subtitled "The Bizarre, The Gruesome, The Frightening" but I do agree that the Cornwall series would be better in a magazine whose main title was fantasy. I don't believe that it would be wise to transfer the series now, as the majority of you who have written in have confirmed my original feeling that the Cornwall stories are more befitting to *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* than were the Stranger Club series, outside of *Caverns of Horror*. (That is one reason why we did transfer that series from one title to another; another reason is that there was no necessary chronological order within the series, so that it made little difference which one was read first.)

So a certain percentage of the tales you see here *might* have fitted in to one of our other three titles; they will be here usually because I am persuaded that the fit is better—and I certainly hope that each issue will contain at least one story which you are persuaded just would not have fitted well in any of the other three magazines (and not because you considerd it poor!) I have on hand, photocopied and ready to put in to the works, a number of long-requested stories which strike me as being good, but which I myself felt didn't quite fit

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into MOH or the other two titles. I'm not going to identify these stories as such when they are run, but telling me your guesses can help to tell me just how closely *en rapport* we may be on the matter.

This, then, is my part of it. Now—will you do yours? You do have a part if, upon reading this or any other issue of our magazines, you feel that your time has not been wasted, or not entirely wasted, and would like to see more issues in the future. Of course, talking about us to friends and acquaintances is desirable; the mechanics and other aspects of distribution are and will remain such that an unhappily large percentage of persons who might enjoy our magazines are not going to become aware of the fact that they exist unless some friend tells them. But more than that, I need to hear from you.

I do not mean that you have to sit down and write a long letter. Everyone who might like to do this does not have the time, and some may not feel adequate to letter-writing, because it seems to them that they ought to be able to write letters like those they read in our letter departments. Such feelings should not be—at least to the point of deterrence—but I know that many readers have them, and I sympathise. However, just a numbering of the stories in order on the preference page is a help. A few notes as to what you liked (or disliked) particularly—in addition to the ratings—is more help. And a letter going in to more detail than will fit on the space you find on the preference page really delights the editor—even if you chew me out, as some of you do, and certainly not always without justice. If I never received valid complaints there would either be something wrong with the readers or I would be perfect. And while I'm ignorant in many respects (as is everyone else) there is one thing I do know: I'm not perfect. RAWL

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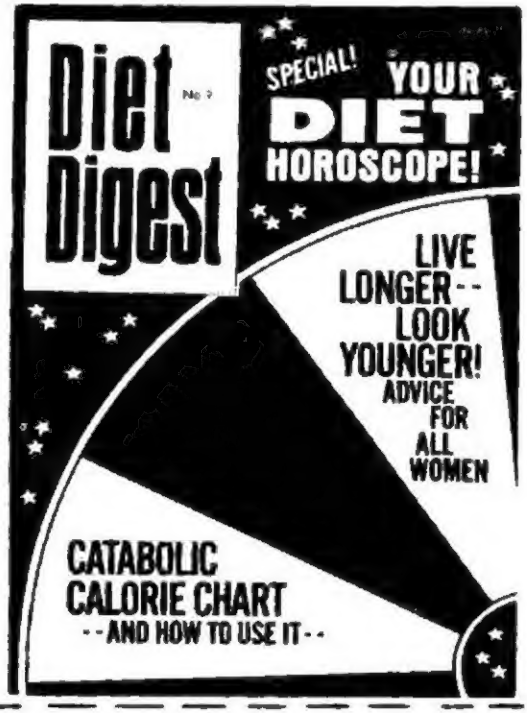

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